

DISCUSSION BOOKS

General Editors :

Richard Wilson, D.Litt., and A. J. J. Ratcliff, M.A.

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

by

ARTHUR BIRNIE



B.R. AMBEDKAR OPEN UNIVERSITY
UNIVERSITY - LIBRARY



N15496

THOMAS NELSON AND SONS LTD
LONDON EDINBURGH PARIS MELBOURNE
TORONTO AND NEW YORK

First published, January 1939

CONTENTS

PREFACE.	vii
INTRODUCTION	9
I. EARLY YEARS	II
II. SAILOR AND PRINTER	18
III. CALIFORNIA	26
IV. RUNAWAY MARRIAGE	34
V. JOURNALISM AND POLITICS	42
VI. THE GREAT DISCOVERY	53
VII. "PROGRESS AND POVERTY"	65
VIII. NEW YORK	77
IX. IRELAND.	88
X. THE BRITISH LECTURE TOURS	101
XI. THE NEW YORK MAYORALTY CAMPAIGN	111
XII. THE UNITED LABOUR PARTY	123
XIII. LEO XIII., SPENCER, AND THE ORTHODOX ECONOMISTS	133
XIV. THE LAST BATTLE	145
A NOTE ON BOOKS	157
INDEX	159

PREFACE

I WISH to acknowledge my indebtedness to the *Life of Henry George*, by Henry George, Jr., from which most of my quotations from George's letters, diaries, and speeches are taken.

A. B.

June 1938.

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

INTRODUCTION

THE neglect which has overtaken Henry George and his theories is a conspicuous example of the fragility of human fame. In his lifetime his reputation was world-wide. His *Progress and Poverty* ran through innumerable editions and was translated into the leading languages of the globe. His gospel of the Single Tax, preached with passionate conviction on lecture platforms in America, Britain, and Australia, made converts by the thousand and inspired an important political movement. In the social controversies of the last two decades of the nineteenth century there is no name that crops up oftener than that of Henry George. Before the end of his life, it is true, his influence had begun to wane. But this was nothing to the tremendous slump in his reputation which took place after his death. Within a few short years his fame withered like a sickly plant. His followers dwindled to a handful. His Single Tax doctrine was received and ticketed in the economist's museum of exploded fallacies. There is something tragic in this sudden eclipse of a great renown.

To the present generation George is little more than a name. Much of this neglect is the world's natural revenge on a man who unduly and unjustifiably raised its hopes. George claimed to have discovered a simple, easy cure for poverty ; time showed this to be a nostrum ; and the world avenged itself by consigning the audacious empiricist to obscurity. But while this is true, posterity has been a little less than just to the brilliant land reformer. When all is said and done, he remains, with the possible exception

INTRODUCTION

of Thorstein Veblen, America's most original economist. He was a trenchant critic of orthodox economic thought. His ideas powerfully influenced social speculation in Europe and America. This is one reason why he should not be forgotten. Another is the romance of his wonderful career—a romance tinged with pathos. The half-educated Philadelphia boy lived to write an economic best-seller, and to start a movement that travelled round the globe. He became a world celebrity. Yet disappointment and disillusionment dogged his footsteps. In his lifetime, the movement he founded failed to conquer success. After his death a swift oblivion overtook the gospel he preached so confidently. The career of this frustrated idealist would make an appropriate theme for a tragic Balzacian novel.

The approach of George's centenary makes it opportune to attempt a fresh survey of his life and work. Not much in the way of full-length biography has been written about him since the appearance, nearly forty years ago, of the official life by his son, Henry George, Junior. That account, though still indispensable, was composed too soon after George's death and by too near a relation to be an impartial survey. The present study aims at being more dispassionate. Its object is to recall a picturesque figure among nineteenth-century reformers, to attempt an estimate of his achievements in thought and action, and to judge them from the standpoint of an age which seems to have repudiated most of his ideals.

CHAPTER I

EARLY YEARS

HENRY GEORGE was born in Philadelphia on September 2, 1839. His father, Richard George, was the son of a Yorkshire shipmaster who had settled in the United States and become the owner of two sailing vessels. Richard George himself was trained as a sailor, but never went to sea, though he performed several voyages on America's inland waterways. After a spell in the Philadelphia custom house he started a small publishing business which specialized in the issue of religious books and tracts. But in 1849 the growing competition of the general publishing houses in the field of religious literature compelled the firm to close down, and Richard George was glad to return to a clerkship in the custom house at 800 dollars a year.

The family which had to subsist on this meagre salary was a large one. Richard George was twice married. By his first wife he had two children, both of whom died young. His second wife, Catherine Vallance, was the daughter of a native of Glasgow who had emigrated to America and acquired some reputation as an engraver. She had received a genteel education, and retained throughout her life a smattering of culture. But her most engrossing interest was religion. She was a genuine if somewhat narrow-minded evangelical Christian. Of her large family of ten, Henry George was the second child and the eldest son. From his parents he derived a mixture of English and Scots blood, and both his grandfathers were British-born. But the environment in which he grew up, and the influences which shaped his character and outlook, were predominantly and distinctively American.

In 1839 Philadelphia was still confined within the limits

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

traced out for it by William Penn. For long the largest and richest city in the United States, it had recently had to cede that position to New York. The strongest impression it left on the minds of visitors was a sensation of unrelieved monotony. The city lay spread out like a great flat brickfield, its outline unbroken by tower or steeple, its rectilinear streets cutting each other with the symmetry of a chessboard. Charles Dickens, who visited the place in 1842, wrote, "I would have given the world for a crooked street." The red houses which lined the brick-paved sidewalks were painful in their uniformity. All had the same colour and shape; all had green shutters on the upper windows and white shutters on the lower; all were reached by pretentious flights of marble steps. In its neatness and its cleanness, its primness and its dullness, Philadelphia reflected something of the spirit of its Quaker founders.

Since colonial days the streets running north and south had been known by numbers, and those running east and west by the names of trees and shrubs native to the province. Thus the little two-storey brick house in which Henry George was born was situated in Tenth Street, just south of Pine Street. It has now been acquired as a memorial by the Henry George Foundation of America. Shortly after Henry's birth the family moved to a house in Third Street, and it was here that the boy spent his early years.

The atmosphere of the George home was strongly pietistic. Cards and the theatre were forbidden pleasures, and the Sabbath was observed with puritan rigour. Richard George was a loyal member of the Episcopal Church and served as vestryman of St. Paul's. To-day, Episcopalians are not generally classed among the puritan sects, but in the early nineteenth century, moral austerity and evangelical zeal were characteristic of all American denominations, and indeed of American society generally. In Philadelphia, where men still walked the streets in Quaker garb, the opposition to worldly amusements and Sabbath desecration was exceptionally strong. When the government proposed to run mails on Sundays the populace drew chains across the streets to stop the stage-coaches. These chains continued a feature of Sunday life in Philadelphia

EARLY YEARS

for long after. The Georges could see them as they wended their way, two by two, to St. Paul's Church to hear a discourse from Dr. Newton, an eloquent "low church" preacher. Twice, and sometimes thrice, a Sunday the family pew was filled. In the interval between services the children attended Sunday School in a gloomy basement room, the windows of which were partially blocked by the tombstones in the churchyard. Only one anecdote of George's prowess as a Sunday scholar has survived. Dr. Newton visited the school one day, when the lesson was the evil of "picking and stealing." "Why," asked the doctor, "do the grocerymen have that wire netting over the dried peaches in the barrel at the store door?" Quick as lightning came the answer from young George, "To keep the flies out." The doctor flushed crimson at this maladroit suggestion. "No!" he thundered, "to keep the hands from picking and stealing."

Of regular schooling George had little. In this he did not differ from most American boys of his generation. De Tocqueville had commented a few years earlier on the state of American education.

"I do not believe there is a country in the world where in proportion to the population there are so few uninstructed and at the same time so few learned individuals. Primary instruction is within the reach of everybody; superior education is scarcely to be obtained by any."¹

Of superior instruction George had none. What education he got never proceeded beyond the elementary stage. He attended a dame's school and spent some time at the Episcopal Academy, an educational institution of some repute. But there he did not feel at home and pleaded to be taken away. He was placed with a private tutor to be prepared for the High School. The tutor was a man of ability, discovered the boy's talents, and drew out his powers. But at the High School, Henry, on his own confession, idled and wasted his time. Before he was fourteen he was taken away at his own request, and began to earn his living as an errand boy at two dollars a week.

¹ *Democracy in America* (Reeve's translation), vol. i., pp. 59-60.

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

That Henry George never enjoyed the benefits of a liberal education was a handicap to him in later life. A knowledge of languages, a grounding in science, and a greater familiarity with what had been done and thought in the past would have been helpful to him in his career as a social reformer. Yet it is doubtful if he could have acquired these advantages from a longer stay at the educational institutions of Philadelphia. American education at this time suffered from the blight of materialism. It paid too much homage to the spirit of Gradgrind. It fed the pupil with "useful" facts and did nothing to develop his character and intelligence. A sensitive mind like Henry George's could profit little from mechanical instruction of this kind. The course of self-education through which he put himself in later years did more to develop his intellectual powers than anything he could have derived from the pedagogues of his native city.

Nevertheless, in his spare time he made efforts to repair the defects of his schooling. He borrowed books from the libraries for which Philadelphia is famous. He attended evening lectures on popular science at the Franklin Institute. But these dry husks of knowledge could do little to nourish his active intelligence. Much more was to be learned from the stirring life around him. Philadelphia was still a magnet for emigrants, and men of all nationalities thronged its streets. It was the second port of the Union, and its harbour was crowded with tapering masts. George had seafaring in his blood, and the wharves were his favourite resort. He talked to the sailors and became familiar with the shape and rig of every kind of craft. He saw the first iron ship that sailed from Philadelphia, and worked out for himself an explanation why ships made of metal could float.¹ These varied experiences did more to broaden his mind and brace his faculties than all the arid learning retailed at the Franklin Institute.

Philadelphia is one of the few American towns with historical memories and monuments. As the boy roamed its streets he found much to stir his imagination and

¹ See his own account in his lecture on *The Study of Political Economy*, pp. 6-7.

EARLY YEARS

remind him of the past of the great republic of which he was born a citizen. In Chestnut Street, along which Washington marched his ragged troops to the battle of Brandywine, stood the old State House, where the Declaration of Independence was proclaimed and the federal constitution drafted. From 1790 to 1800 Philadelphia was the federal capital, and the city was full of memories of the Fathers of the Republic. In Christ Church was shown the pew where Washington worshipped, and outside in the graveyard the tomb of Benjamin Franklin with its inscription :

He snatched the lightning from the clouds and the
sceptre from tyrants.

Not far from the State House was a reminder of a less glorious chapter in the nation's history. On his first morning in Philadelphia, Dickens gazed in amazement from his hotel window at an absurdly magnificent edifice in the form of a Greek temple, which looked "as if the marble statue of Don Guzman could alone have any business to transact within its gloomy walls." On inquiry he was told it was the United States Bank, "the tomb of many fortunes, the great catacomb of investment." The story of the Bank is the story of the first determined effort of the money power to capture sovereign authority in America, an attempt which was foiled by a great uprising of the agrarian West under the Jeffersonian democrat Andrew Jackson. The Bank's privileges were cancelled, and it was forced into bankruptcy. The Greek temple, its headquarters, was eventually taken over by the government as the Philadelphia custom house, and Richard George drove a quill within its walls.

.In a sense the two famous buildings in Chestnut Street symbolize two great currents in American history, two political tendencies which have come to be associated with the names of Jefferson and Hamilton. The State House represents the democratic ideal, the dream of a nation dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. The Bank stands for the plutocracy which in so

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

many different ways and under so many different disguises has prevented that dream from coming true. In the clash of these mighty opposites George played his part manfully. A Jeffersonian democrat to the core, he spent his life battling for the idealism of the State House against the materialism of the Bank.

At the age of fifteen George was a ruddy, blue-eyed youth, rather short of stature, slightly built, but alert and physically active. Already one of the chief flaws in his character had become visible. He was hot-tempered, wilful, and insubordinate. His father found him difficult to control. Once he ran away from home after being chastised for a slight fault. Fortunately such incidents were rare. The discipline of the household, despite the puritanism of the parents, was not unduly strict, and Henry, as the eldest son, enjoyed a privileged position—admired by his father, petted by his mother, and worshipped by his brothers and sisters. Still, the truth is he was more than a little spoilt.

Meanwhile the boy had to earn his living. In the bustling America of the eighteen-fifties the opportunities to enterprising youth seemed endless. It was the "hot air" period of American history. The young Republic was beginning to realize its strength, and its citizens were setting out to whip universal nature. A steady stream of emigration was flowing across the Atlantic, providing abundant hands for the plough and the loom; a growing industrialism in the North-east was tearing rich minerals from the earth and blackening the sky with its factory smoke; in the South the insatiable demand of Lancashire for its raw material was pouring gold into the pockets of the cotton planters; across the Appalachians a hardy population was pushing ever westward, in fulfilment of its manifest destiny to reach the Pacific. The whole business of money-making had been transformed. It was no longer a question of acquiring a competence. Vast fortunes were now within reach of the able, the energetic, the lucky, or the unscrupulous. With unquenchable ardour the whole nation plunged headlong into the race for wealth. Gone for ever was the calm sedateness of

EARLY YEARS

colonial days. The age of hustle had commenced. The American business man was on his throne.

Henry George grew up amid all this feverish activity. Incessantly, the gospel of material success was dinned into his ears. His elders represented money-making as a virtue, and wealth as the great measure of achievement. "If you are honest," one of his uncles told him, "if you are steady, if you are industrious, you can certainly look forward to being able to retire at forty with comfort for the rest of your days." There were plenty of examples of self-made men to confirm the truth of these words—Franklin, whose *Autobiography* every American boy knew by heart; Girard, the one-eyed Philadelphia banker, who left \$6,000,000; Astor of New York, with his fabulous wealth; and hundreds more. Henry's boyish ambition was stirred. He asked nothing better than to make a fortune. But he found it difficult to get a footing on the ladder of success. The post of errand boy had been exchanged for that of clerk in a marine store, but this represented no advancement. Moreover, certain instincts competed in his mind with his desire for a successful business career. From his seafaring grandfather, he had inherited a thirst for adventure, a longing to see distant lands and peoples. In none of the prosaic pursuits of the American bourgeoisie could such a yearning be satisfied. There was only one way in which a boy in his position could gratify his desire to travel, and that was by going to sea. Henry took the sudden resolve to be a sailor. The announcement of this determination caused consternation in the little household in Third Street, but the parents deemed it wise not to baulk the lad of his ambition. Some experience of a sailor's life might cure him of his longing. A friend of the family, Captain Miller, had lately obtained the command of an old East Indiaman and consented to take Henry as foremast boy. "Don't make his berth too comfortable," said Richard George, and the captain promised. On April 2, 1855, Henry took leave of his family, travelled to New York, and boarded the sailing ship *Hindoo*, bound for Australia and India.

CHAPTER II

SAILOR AND PRINTER

In the eighteen-fifties, American shipping was at its zenith.

"Shipbuilding," wrote George thirty years later, "had reached such a pitch of excellence in this country that we built not only for ourselves but for other nations. American ships were the fastest sailers, the largest carriers, and everywhere got the quickest dispatch and the highest freights. The registered tonnage of the United States almost equalled that of Great Britain, and a few years promised to give us the unquestionable supremacy of the ocean."¹

There was a dark side to this story of progress. The prosperity of American shipping was built up on the cruel exploitation of the common seaman. For years, ship-owners had beaten down wages and filled their forecables with aliens. The respectable American sailor was driven out of the service. Those who remained had to submit to the brutal tyranny of savage captains and mates. The ferocious discipline of the Yankee "hell ships" became a legend of the seas. Something of the purgatory of the fore-castle had been revealed in two great classics of the sea, Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast* and Melville's *Moby Dick*, but these exposures had produced little improvement in the sailor's lot. Flogging, it is true, was legally abolished, but in practice physical assault remained the recognized method of maintaining discipline among seamen. In the hands of a vicious ship's officer a belaying pin or a marline spike was an effective substitute for a rope's end.

Unwittingly, George had chosen one of the grimmest

¹ *Protection or Free Trade*, p. 186. Those were still the days of wooden sailing ships, and America's rich supplies of timber gave her an advantage. The advent of iron and steel steamships enabled Britain to retain her maritime supremacy.

SAILOR AND PRINTER

and most heart-breaking of callings. Yet his choice was not so eccentric as it might appear to-day. The call of the sea has always been strong, and in sailing ship days it was so insistent that wealthy sons of good families often shipped before the mast and worked their way up to the quarter-deck. Even when destined for business or professional pursuits, middle-class youths sometimes preferred a spell at sea to a course at college or university. Dana and Melville are only two examples of brilliant Americans to whom the rough forecabin of a sailing ship was their Harvard or their Yale.

The *Hindoo* began her voyage about a week after George joined her. On 10th April she weighed anchor and made for the open sea. As she glided down the Narrows George was on the deck picking oakum. If he had glanced over the bulwarks he might have picked out on the left bank a white house with which he was one day to have close associations. It was his home during the last years of his life, and from it his body was carried for burial to the cemetery on the hill crest above.

George was soon broken in to the life of a merchant seaman. He overcame his aversion to grease and tar, and after the first few days' sea-sickness was kept busy at the thousand and one jobs to be done on a windjammer—"tarring, greasing, oiling, varnishing, painting, scrubbing, scraping, steering, reefing, furling, loosing, making and setting sail, pulling, hauling and climbing in every direction" (Dana). It was the unwritten law of a sailing ship that the crew must never be for a moment idle. As the old sailor's catechism put it :

"Six days shalt thou labour and do all thou art able,
And on the seventh—holystone the decks and scrape the
cable."

This is how the crew of the *Hindoo* spent the great American national holiday, as recorded in the diary which George kept throughout the voyage :

"Wed. July 4. At 12 o'clock last night the day was ushered in by three discharges from a small swivel which made a great

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

deal of noise, rousing up all who were asleep. As soon as the smoke cleared away and the dead and wounded were mustered, it was found that it had not been without execution, all the glass on one side of the house being shattered (a loss not easily repaired), a port blown out, and the waddings (made of rope yarn and very hard) had passed, one through the head of the new water cask, and another through the new foretopsail, which had not been bent a week. The wind which had been strong from aft the day before, during the middle watch died away and was succeeded by a calm until 8 a.m. when a stiff breeze from the south sprang up, accompanied by showers of rain. At 12 M. all hands were called to reef. While reefing the foretopsail, the parrel of the yard gave way, causing a great deal of trouble and keeping all hands from dinner. It was 2.30 p.m. before our watch got below to their plum-duff which had been allowed in honour of the day. The rest of the day was raining, with wind constantly varying, keeping us hauling on the braces. Thus closed the most miserable 4th of July that I have ever yet spent."

Despite his small stature and slight build, George stood up well to the hardships of a seaman's life. His health kept good and the open air gave him an appetite for the hard biscuit, salt junk, and rare plum-duff which were the staple of the sailor's fare. Occasionally spasms of homesickness swept over him. "Would have given anything to have been back to breakfast" is a recurring entry in the diary. And the memory of the family larder haunted him like a passion. "I wish I were at home," he would say to his shipmates, "to get a piece of pie." On the whole, it is pretty plain that he did not find the life congenial. But he kept up his spirits and took what came to him without snivelling. Though he abandoned the sea as a permanent career, he caught something of the affection which the sailing ships inspired in their crews. In his last book there is a loving description of the stately progress of an old windjammer :

"The noble vessel, bending gracefully to the breeze, under her cloud of canvass, comes driving along, cleaving white furrows at her bow and leaving a yeasty wake at her stern. . . . So harmonious are her movements, so seemingly instinct with life, that a savage who sees for the first time such a vessel

SAILOR AND PRINTER

beating along the coast might take her for a great bird, changing its direction with the movement of its wings as do seagull and albatross." ¹

On the 97th day of the voyage the *Hindoo* reached the Cape of Good Hope, passing far to the south of it, as was the custom of the sailing ships in those days. Then, in the teeth of heavy gales, she clove her way across the Indian Ocean. Henry watched with admiration the battle of the elements. "It is impossible," he wrote in the diary, "to describe the wildly grand appearance of the sea and sky." Heavy seas broke over the decks, and rain and hail beat on the masts and rigging. But the *Hindoo* held gallantly on her course, until, on 24th August, the coast of Australia hove in sight. Next day the ship sailed into Hobson's Bay and berthed at Melbourne.

Henry visited the town, and recalled in after years "its busy streets, its seemingly continuous auctions, its crowds of men with flannel shirts and long high boots, its bay crowded with ships." The gold fever was at its height, and Melbourne was swarming with an adventurous population drawn from the four quarters of the globe. But the place does not seem to have stirred the boy's imagination. He was more interested in the domestic revolution which broke out on the *Hindoo*. The adult members of the crew wanted to try their luck at the diggings. They went in a body to the captain and demanded their discharge. The captain summoned the American consul on board, and the mutineers were sentenced to a month's hard labour. But this did not break their resolution. Captain Miller was obliged to let them have their way and sign on a fresh crew.

A month later the *Hindoo*, having discharged her cargo of timber, sailed for Calcutta in ballast. The weather was warm and pleasant, but the winds were contrary, and it was not till the end of November that the Hooghly was sighted. At Calcutta Henry had his first glimpse of the colourful East, but the experience was disappointing. It was the squalor not the glamour of the Orient that impressed him.

¹ *The Science of Political Economy*, pp. 302-3.

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

"One feature," he wrote home, "which is peculiar to Calcutta is the number of dead bodies floating down in all stages of decomposition, covered with crows who are actively engaged in picking them to pieces. The first one I saw filled me with horror and disgust, but like the natives you soon cease to pay any attention to them."

On January 15, 1856, the *Hindoo*, with a cargo of rice and seeds, turned its prow homewards. On 13th April the Cape of Good Hope was reached. On 12th May Henry crossed the equator for the fourth time since he left home, and four weeks later, after an absence of fourteen months, the *Hindoo* sailed into New York Bay.

One thing the voyage had done for Henry—it had cured him of his longing for the sea. He had tasted something of the misery of the forecastle. And he had discovered, as most sailors do, that the deck of a ship is not the best place from which to see the world. "Sailors," wrote Herman Melville, "don't see the world. They land only upon wharves and pierheads, and their reminiscences of travel are only a dim recollection of a chain of tap rooms surrounding the globe." Henry had verified this, and it made him all the readier to fall in with his parents' wishes and settle down to a career on shore. His father, through his old publishing connections, secured him a job as apprentice compositor, and thus George followed in the footsteps of distinguished Americans like Franklin, Greely, Bret Harte, and Mark Twain, all of whom began their careers at the compositor's case. The choice of a trade was not a bad one. The setting of printed matter gave the boy opportunities to extend his information, and the necessity of keeping close to his copy at last overcame a weakness in spelling which had troubled him since his schooldays.

At home the return of the sailor boy threatened for a time the peace of the domestic circle. Henry's experience of seafaring life had been sufficient to uproot old loyalties and teach him habits which offended the puritan susceptibilities of his parents. He smoked cigars, he drank whisky, he kept late hours. This behaviour produced some painful domestic scenes. The strain, however, never reached breaking-point. Richard George realized that his

SAILOR AND PRINTER

high-spirited son must not be ridden with too tight a rein ; and Henry, on his side, though ready to flare up at the slightest reproof, suffered genuine remorse when he knew he had wounded his parents. A policy of give-and-take kept the domestic atmosphere sweet. Henry was allowed more liberty than he enjoyed before he went to sea, and he in turn did his best not to abuse the privileges accorded him.

Despite his fondness for fun and amusement, the boy did not neglect the task of self-culture. He took lessons in penmanship and joined a lads' club for mutual improvement. The members met in a disused church building. Much of their time was frankly given over to boxing, fencing, and general skylarking, but there were occasional meetings for more serious purposes. Debates were held and papers read. To these intellectual proceedings Henry contributed two essays, one a hostile review of Mormonism, the other a flowery effusion on "The Poetry of Life." The boy seized every opportunity to enlarge his knowledge and sharpen his wits. At home and in the printing office he joined eagerly in the discussions of his elders. "Henry," commented one of his uncles, "is not tongue-tied." On the question of slavery, then bulking large in public discussion, he took a stand in opposition to his parents, who were Democrats and inclined to regard the Slave Power with indulgence. To his mother, who argued that few slave-owners were hard-hearted enough to treat their slaves cruelly, Henry retorted that this did not affect the question of principle. Slavery was wrong because it gave the planters the *power* to ill-treat their slaves if they chose. Already the intransigence of the abstract reasoner was beginning to show itself.

All this time bread and butter problems were pressing for attention. Henry had been fired from his job after a row with the foreman, whom he accused of tyranny. His own irascible temper was more likely to blame. All his life he found it difficult to submit to authority. Work was so scarce in the printing trade that Henry was driven to take a job on a schooner bound for Boston. When he applied for the berth the captain measured his inches contemptuously.

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

"What can you do?" he demanded curtly.

"I can handle, reef, and steer," said George.

"You can't steer this schooner," retorted the captain;
"but I'll try you."

Despite this inauspicious start, George gave such satisfaction that when he was discharged the captain paid him a man's wages.

Back in Philadelphia work was no easier to get. The financial crisis of 1857 had spread a desolating pall of unemployment over the American cities. In despair George began to think of migrating westward. This was the traditional American method of escaping economic pressure. The frontier was the safety-valve of the American economy. Every industrial depression sent a fresh wave of population over the Appalachians. Henry had connections in the Far West. A cousin was a book-keeper in San Francisco, and some former neighbours, the Currys, had settled in Oregon. Mrs. Curry's nephew was governor of the Oregon territory, and she wrote inviting the lad to come to the North-west. Henry was willing, but there were certain preliminary difficulties to be overcome. The journey to the Pacific coast was a formidable undertaking. Beyond the Mississippi lay an immense, sparsely watered region, more difficult to cross than a pathless ocean. Death by starvation or at the hands of marauding Indians lurked for the traveller within its depths. Henry had no stomach for these risks, and in any case he had no facilities for joining any of the caravans which heroically braved the perils of the great American desert. There remained the alternative routes, safer but longer, by the Isthmus of Panama or round Cape Horn. The raising of the passage money might have been an obstacle here, but George was able to overcome it, thanks to his nautical training. He managed to work his way round the Horn. In Philadelphia docks a government lighthouse steamer was lying, the *Shubrick*. It was intended for service on the Pacific coast. George secured a place on her as ship's steward at \$40 a month. At the end of the year came a second parting from his family, all the more painful because this time the separation seemed likely to be a long one, and on December

SAILOR AND PRINTER

22, 1857, the *Shubrick* steamed down the Delaware on the first stage of her long voyage to California.

On the *Shubrick* George had an exciting experience. He was very nearly shipwrecked. On Christmas Day the vessel ran into a violent squall near Cape Hatteras. Heavy seas stove in the bulwarks, and the captain began to fear that the ship would founder. He gave orders to lighten her, and George and a negro deck-hand were set to work pitching sacks of coal overboard, the captain feverishly exhorting them through his speaking trumpet. After thirty tons of coal had been got rid of in this way, the *Shubrick* was able to make her way to St. Thomas in the West Indies, where she put in to refuel and refit.

In the Straits of Magellan the ship met with more bad weather. The headwinds were so strong that the coal supply became exhausted and the crew had to land and cut wood for fuel.

"We ran into a little harbour in the strait," George wrote home, "and came upon a schooner which belonged to English missionaries with whom we exchanged letters. The missionaries were praying and working with the native Terra del Fuegians. We saw a number of these natives and they were not at all attractive. I heard afterwards that the Patagonians killed and ate these missionaries."

From Magellan the *Shubrick* crept slowly up the coast of South America and reached its destination after a five month's voyage. On May 27, 1858, the vessel steamed through the Golden Gates, and George gazed, as a young Scotsman twenty years later was to gaze, on "the fine bulk of Talmapais looking down on San Francisco like Arthur's Seat on Edinburgh."¹

¹ R. L. Stevenson, *Across the Plains* (Pentland Edition), p. 160.

CHAPTER III

CALIFORNIA

THE next twenty years of George's life were spent in the seething, bubbling cauldron of Californian society. He grew from youth to manhood in one of the most singular communities that the world has known. The invasion of the "forty-niners" wrought a terrible transformation in the sleepy California of Mexican days. Its primitive Spanish population, living under the easy sway of a handful of monks and hidalgos, was swept aside by the savage onrush of a horde of cosmopolitan adventurers. The city of St. Francis became the city of Mammon. The soil dedicated to the cult of poverty became the home of the most ferocious egotism. A whole population was driven literally crazy with the lust for gold. The yellow metal became the Californian's god. He tore it from the bowels of the earth. He wrested it by force or guile from his fellow-men. He spent his days and nights in a perpetual whirl of excitement—now intoxicated to madness by the hope of gain, now plunged into despair when fortune eluded him. The gambling fever had every one in its grip. It tainted all the operations of commerce and industry. The prosaic methods of acquiring wealth were held in universal contempt. The Californian's one dream was to "strike it lucky," to find a rich vein of ore, to make a successful deal in land or commodities. Nowhere was there a keener desire to appropriate the rewards of labour without effort. Nowhere was the goddess of chance worshipped with more frantic devotion. San Francisco was little more than a huge gambling hell.

In this morbid atmosphere the virtues which hold men together in societies withered and died. Human relation-

CALIFORNIA

ships dissolved in a whirlpool of greed and lust, and man, reduced to the level of the beast, preyed on his fellow-man. It is hard to imagine a more unfavourable soil for the nurture of an idealist. Yet it was in this uncongenial environment that Henry George evolved and matured his social gospel.

No inkling of what the future held for him, however, was in the mind of the lad who disembarked on San Francisco wharf that summer afternoon of 1858. He had come to California to seek his fortune, and his sole preoccupation was to seize the chances offered by this golden land of opportunity. As yet his plans were vague. He had thoughts of pushing on to Oregon. But for this he must secure his freedom. When he joined the *Shubrick* he had signed articles which bound him to serve for twelve months, and his year of service did not expire till November. George solved this problem in simple fashion. He took French leave. In plain language, he deserted. His cousin, Jim George, offered him the shelter of his house, and Henry lived quietly there until the danger of arrest was past. In point of fact, he need not have worried. Several officers and men of the *Shubrick* deserted to the goldfields, but by some accident George's departure was not noticed, and his name appeared on the ship's roll as having served out his full term.

When it was safe to venture abroad George explored the sights of San Francisco in company with a young Yankee, George Wilbur, whose acquaintance he had made. By 1858 the city had emerged from the first hectic period in its history. Two years before, the Vigilantes had organized the better elements of the population and established a measure of order. Life became tolerable for decent citizens. But the tradition of lawlessness died hard. Desperadoes, armed to the teeth, still roamed the streets; ex-convicts from Botany Bay preyed on their victims in dark lanes and side-alleys; shady Southern politicians brought with them their peculiar code of honour and insisted on settling their quarrels like gentlemen. Duels and shootings-up were of daily occurrence. Still the law-abiding part of the population had unmistakably got the

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

upper hand. Architecturally, too, the city had made progress. The "cloth and paper" shanties of the pioneers were disappearing; substantial wooden buildings were being erected; and the community was acquiring some of the conveniences of civilized life. The streets rose, tier upon tier, from the waters of the bay, and through them moved a cheerful, colourful, cosmopolitan throng. The bearded American miner with his red shirt and high boots rubbed shoulders with the inscrutable Chinaman in his blue calico breeches and wide wickerwork hat. The Mexican lady in her graceful *reboso*¹ swept haughtily past the ogling French dandy, dressed in the latest Parisian fashion. Every clime under heaven had sent its representatives to the city of gold. In some streets "the proverbs of Sancho Panza were still spoken in the language of Cervantes" (Bret Harte). In others the air was heavy with the perfumed incense of the Oriental joss-house. Over all lay the golden sunshine of California, tempered by the cool breezes from the Pacific, while in the blue distance towered the lofty Sierras, beneath whose snowy summits an army of miners slaved to produce the yellow dust which was the basis of all this stirring, multifarious life.

George wrote home that San Francisco was "a dashing place, rather faster than Philadelphia"! But his mind was fixed on Oregon, and he waited impatiently for a letter from the Currys. No letter came, and the lad was left kicking his heels in San Francisco and consuming his small store of savings. Ultimately Mrs. Curry wrote that business was dull in the North-west and the chances of employment small. She recommended the lad to stay where he was. This was chilling news. No opportunity of work had presented itself in San Francisco, and George's supply of money was almost exhausted. At this juncture rumours spread that gold had been discovered on the Fraser River, just over the Canadian border. At once there was a wild stampede from the Californian diggings. Henry's cousin, Jim George, determined to profit by the rush. He went to Victoria, Vancouver, the jumping-off place for the diggings, and opened a miners' supply store.

¹ A kind of mantilla.

CALIFORNIA

Already this little town was swarming with ten thousand miners living in tents and shacks. Henry, having nothing else in view, decided to follow his cousin. Once more his seaman's training came in useful. He was able to work his way to Victoria on a topsail schooner. His intention was to try his luck at the diggings, but when he arrived he found that the "terrible Fraser" had come down in flood and brought all mining operations to a standstill. Till the waters fell there was no point in going farther. Henry gladly accepted a post as assistant in Jim George's store.

For the next two months Henry roughed it in traditional western fashion. The store was a little wooden hut near the harbour. A pinned notice invited customers who came outside the regular hours to "give the door a kick." Henry slept in the shop, and did all his own cooking and washing. To one of his sisters he wrote :

"You innocently ask whether I made my own bed at Victoria. Why, bless you, my dear little sister, I had none to make! Part of the time I slept rolled up in my blanket on the counter, or on a pile of flour, and afterwards I had a straw mattress on some boards. The only difference between my sleeping and my waking costumes was that during the day I wore both boots and cap, and at night dispensed with them."

The store was a convenient refuge, but George's fiery temper robbed him of this sanctuary. He quarrelled with Jim George, the fault, as he afterwards admitted, being on his side. Leaving the store, he took up his quarters in a tent, having as companion his friend Wilbur, who had also come to try his fortune at the diggings but was now driving a water-cart for a living. Life under canvas was a trying experience in the depths of a Canadian winter, and Henry's resolution began to ebb. Depressing news came down from the diggings. Miners arrived back in Victoria destitute and exhausted, bringing with them gloomy tales of disaster. Henry began to think (a surmise which ultimately proved correct) that the accounts of gold discoveries had been grossly exaggerated, and he resolved to go back to San Francisco. As he had no money to pay his fare, Wilbur lent him some and saw him on the boat.

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

"He had no coat," Wilbur related afterwards, "so I gave him mine. An old fellow named Wolf peddled pies among the tents, and thinking that Henry would enjoy these more than the food he would get aboard the ship, we bought six of them and drew the blanket over them so that nobody would see them and steal them. He wrote me from San Francisco when he got down that the first night out he was so tired that he threw himself down on his bunk without undressing and that he did not think of the pies until the morning, when he found he had been lying on top of them all night."

Back in San Francisco the search for work proved as fruitless as before, and Henry had almost made up his mind to sign on again as a seaman when by good luck he ran across a printer whom he had known in Philadelphia. This friend secured him a printing job which kept him going for several months. Then business became dull, and he was once more on the street. Resolved to stick at nothing, he became a weigher in a rice mill. But even this gave out in the early summer of 1859. In a fit of desperation the lad started to walk to the Californian goldfields. It was a rash and foolish undertaking. Before he had gone far he had to give up through sheer want of food, and make his way as best he could back to San Francisco.

At this desperate crisis of his fortunes his Philadelphia printer friend came again to his rescue and got him a compositor's place on a weekly paper, the *Home Journal*. This was the steadiest job Henry had had since he came to California. It lasted for over a year. At first he had to work as an apprentice, but when he came of age in September 1860 he drew journeyman's wages, and shortly afterwards was promoted foreman at \$30 a week. After the buffeting of the last two years George was glad to settle down. His hard experience had cooled his ambition. He gave up his dreams of making a fortune and accepted the position of wage-earner as his permanent lot. About this time he joined the local printers' trade union, honorary membership of which he retained till the end of his life.

During this period the young man roomed in various quarters of San Francisco. When he came back from the Fraser he stayed at a temperance hotel, the "What Cheer

CALIFORNIA

House," which had a library of several hundred volumes. George browsed among this collection and made his first acquaintance with some of the great classics of English and American literature. He came across a copy of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, but contented himself with inspecting the outside of the book. His interest in economics was not yet aroused. After he left the "What Cheer House" he kept up his general reading. Wilbur, who was now back from Vancouver, and with whom he shared a lodging, relates :

"Very soon after our acquaintance I discovered that he was studious and eager to acquire knowledge, and when we came to room together, I frequently woke up at night to find him reading or writing. If I said 'Good heavens, Harry, what's the matter? Are you sick?' he'd tell me to go to sleep or invite me to get dressed and go out for a walk with him. A spin round for a few blocks would do and then we'd get to bed again. I never saw such a restless human being."

About this time George took a step, the importance of which his family enormously exaggerated. He joined a Methodist congregation. His mother at once leapt to the conclusion that he had undergone the process of conversion.

"Good news, good news!" she wrote ecstatically. "Oh how much better the Lord has been to us than we deserved! . . . I now desire to say 'Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name. For thou hast delivered the soul of my child from death and his feet from falling.'"

Mrs. George was under a complete misapprehension. Henry had joined the church mainly because some friends belonged to it and invited him to become a member. Temperamentally, he had little sympathy with the evangelicalism of his parents, and it is practically certain that he never at any time went through the religious experience of conversion. Yet he was not irreligious by nature. After a period of youthful scepticism he worked out for himself a creed of his own, a kind of emotional Theism, to which he adhered for the rest of his life. He was not an orthodox

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

Christian. He once said that his religious views were those of Jefferson, and Jefferson was not a believer in the Trinity. In George's simple credo, the two main items were the Fatherhood of God and the immortality of the soul. Yet, more so than in the case of most professing Christians, his religion was an active force in his life and a dynamic of his thought. When he came to work out his social and economic theories, he took as his starting-point the two great religious doctrines which he had come to hold with all the fervour of his passionate nature—the belief in a benevolent Creator and the hope of a life after death. Despite his unorthodoxy, his approach to social problems was very much that of the English Christian Socialists.

Meanwhile fate had become unkind to him again. The *Home Journal* came to an end, and George lost his regular job. He was reduced to doing occasional work for newspapers—"subbing," it was called. To escape from this precarious position he formed a plan to buy up a moribund newspaper called the *Evening Journal*. He entered into a partnership with five other unemployed printers. They pooled their small savings and purchased the plant and goodwill of the newspaper at a cheap rate. The partners decided to gather the news themselves and do the printing with their own hands. Ten years earlier such a scheme might have had a chance of success, but in the eighties the day of the small man in newspaper production was practically over. George and his friends toiled like galley slaves. "I worked," said George afterwards, "until my clothes were in rags and the toes of my shoes were out. I slept in the office and did the best I could to economize, but finally I ran in debt thirty dollars for my board bill." No sacrifices were of the least avail. In October 1861 the tottering enterprise received a fatal blow when the trans-continental telegraph line was completed. The *Journal* could not afford to buy telegraphic news. George became convinced that the struggle was hopeless and withdrew from the business, sacrificing the little money he had put into it. He went back to "subbing," at which he could always earn a little.

While the young man was waging this hard battle with

CALIFORNIA

circumstance, great events were taking place in the political sphere. The slavery question at last split the nation in twain. In November 1860 Abraham Lincoln was elected President, George, who had just come of age, recording his first vote for him. The secession of the Slave States followed, and the whole series of stormy events which set North and South in arms against each other. Like most Californians, George enthusiastically embraced the cause of the North. If he had still been living in Philadelphia he would have undoubtedly enlisted in the Union army. But in the days before the transcontinental railway, San Francisco was farther from New York than New York from London. California, indeed, scarcely formed part of the American political system. As a state she supported the North, but she could render no direct military aid to the federal government. If a Californian wished to strike an active blow in defence of the Union, he had first to travel east at his own expense. In George's case this was utterly out of the question, and so he was condemned to remain a spectator during one of the most stirring periods in his country's history. He did not relish his forced inactivity.

"I cannot help feeling regret," he wrote home, "that the contest will be over and the victories won without my having taken the slightest part in it. If I am East after the war is ended, I will feel abashed among its heroes."

In the meantime fate summoned him to face a crisis in his own life.

CHAPTER IV

RUNAWAY MARRIAGE

WHILE George was still foreman on the *Home Journal* his friend Wilbur introduced him to Annie Fox, a young girl of seventeen. The friendship between the two speedily ripened into a warmer sentiment, and they became unofficially engaged. For a time their courtship pursued its placid course. They took quiet walks together; they exchanged books; they discussed their favourite authors. A popular publication of the time was Charles Dana's *Household Book of Poetry*, a huge volume containing extracts from the best English poets. The young couple secured this, pored over it together, and memorized their favourite poems. The affection of the warm-hearted intelligent girl was a precious consolation to George in his strenuous battle with hard circumstance. But the course of his love was not destined to run smoothly. The relatives of the lady felt small enthusiasm for the aggressive little printer. Annie Fox was an orphan. Her father was a British officer who married her mother in Australia. The marriage was not happy, and after two children had been born the couple separated. The father was never heard of again. The mother brought her two girls to her own father's house in San Francisco, where she died shortly afterwards. Annie lived first with her grandmother and then with an aunt, a Mrs. Flintoff, but her chief guardian was her maternal uncle, Matthew M'Closkey, one of the San Francisco pioneers, who had made a comfortable fortune from speculation in real estate. The M'Closkeys were Roman Catholics, and Annie was brought up in that faith. She received most of her education at a convent school in Los Angeles, and her sister became a nun.

RUNAWAY MARRIAGE

Unfortunately for George's chances of making a good impression on his sweetheart's family, his fortunes during his courtship were at an extremely low ebb. He was engaged in his hopeless struggle to make the *Evening Journal* a paying proposition. Annie was aware of his desperate financial condition. One day she paid a visit to the printing office of the *Journal*. George showed her round, and then pointing to a kind of folding cot with mattress and grey blankets, announced that this was his bed. The young girl could not help exclaiming, "I hope your mother does not know of this." His poverty made no difference to her, but naturally her guardians regarded the matter in another light. Matthew M'Closkey, a prosperous self-made man, looked with disdain on this threadbare suitor. Nor was his distaste diminished by the young fellow's opinionativeness and the tactlessness with which he contradicted his elders in argument. One day M'Closkey took the opportunity to tell him that until he could show more visible signs of ability to maintain a wife, he must make his visits to Miss Fox less frequent. This was just the sort of situation which George's temper made him totally unable to handle. Stung to the quick by the insult, he retorted angrily; a heated argument followed and the two men almost came to blows. The irate guardian forbade George ever to see Miss Fox again.

Despite this prohibition the lovers met next day. It was December 3, 1861, a momentous date in the lives of both. Annie was very depressed and spoke of going to Los Angeles to teach in a school there. George demurred. "If you go," he said, "I'll not see you again." Then, obeying a sudden impulse, he drew a coin from his pocket. "Annie," he said, "that is all the money I have in the world. Will you marry me?" It was not an attractive prospect for the young girl, but she bravely replied, "If you are willing to undertake the responsibilities of marriage I will marry you." In this inconsiderate fashion did these two foolish young people take the most important decision of their lives.

Once marriage was decided on, George, with his usual impetuosity, determined that there should be no delay.

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

The marriage was to take place that very night, and Annie was to elope from her home. In great excitement the bridegroom ran off to borrow money and clothes, to arrange for rooms, and to secure a clergyman. No marriage licence was then required in California, so there was no legal obstacle to the immediate performance of the ceremony. At nightfall a carriage called at the Flintoff house. In it was Isaac Trump, one of George's *Shubrick* friends. By arrangement he inquired for "Miss Brown," and Annie appeared carrying a huge package which Trump thought must contain important valuables, but which really consisted of all the books of poetry which she and George had read together. This was the precious freight with which she took her flight. Some distance from the house the carriage picked up George, and the party adjourned for supper to a miners' restaurant, proceeding afterwards on foot to the Methodist Bethel, where the marriage was to take place. It was a bright moonlight night, but the streets were wet with rain. Whenever they came to a pool George gallantly lifted his bride in his arms and carried her across. At the church a small party of friends was waiting. Annie would have preferred to be married in a Catholic church, but for this George's impatience left no time. However, the minister obligingly read the Episcopalian marriage service, which, he explained, more nearly approached the Catholic than the one he was accustomed to use. Isaac Trump was one of the witnesses. When the clergyman asked him his name he replied promptly, "I. Trump." "I perceive you do," said the puzzled parson, "but please tell me your name." When the ceremony was over George walked off with his wife to the cheap boarding-house where he had taken a room for the night. There was no opportunity for a honeymoon. George was "subbing," and the next morning at five o'clock he had to go out and look for work. Fortunately he got a job for the day, and another in the evening which kept him busy till the early hours of the following morning. The money he earned paid his board-bill, but Annie, left solitary in the dismal surroundings of a third-rate boarding-house, must have found the first day of her married life bleak indeed.

RUNAWAY MARRIAGE

George was twenty-two at the time of his marriage, and his wife eighteen. Few unions could have held out smaller prospects of happiness. It was entered on with complete disregard of all worldly considerations, and dearly did the young pair pay for their rashness. The first few years of their married life were a long battle against poverty, not the genteel poverty which is behindhand with its bills, but the grim destitution which does not know where to turn for a meal. The responsibility for this unfortunate situation was George's. It was he who insisted on the hasty marriage, filled with blind rage against M'Closkey and burning to pay him out. We can sympathize with the young man's lacerated feelings, but he had no right to secure balm for his wound at the expense of a young girl's happiness. Unfortunately, George was not without a share of the egotism of genius. He was not deliberately selfish, but he was too engrossed in himself to take a proper view of the rights of others. Of all the youthful follies his headstrong nature led him to commit, his marriage was the least defensible. The only person who comes out of the transaction with any credit is Mrs. George. She uttered no word of reproach and bore without a murmur the unaccustomed hardships of her lot. Though brought up in comparative luxury and having never known what it was to work for her living, she bravely faced the realities of the situation and tried by sewing and other means to augment the slender family income. But for her wisdom, patience, and courage the little household would have foundered miserably in the storms of the next few years.

A few days after his marriage George was offered a job on a Sacramento newspaper, and the young couple betook themselves to the Californian capital. The town lay surrounded by gardens and cornfields at the junction of two great rivers which periodically overflowed their banks. Soon after their arrival the Georges had an experience of the terrible floods for which the district is notorious. The Sacramento burst its banks and poured its waters in a foaming torrent through the streets. George hurried home to warn his wife. Already the water had penetrated the

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

lower rooms of their boarding-house, and they and the other guests had to escape on an improvised bridge of chairs. For weeks the lower parts of the town remained submerged. The Georges lived in the upper storey of their boarding-house, and George made his way daily to his printing-office over the roofs of the neighbouring houses. The community suffered the extremity of discomfort. Wash and bath tubs had to be used as rafts. Food and fuel ran short. The supply of liquor became exhausted—a severe privation to the sociable Californians. But as the summer drew on the waters subsided and life became more agreeable. To his family George wrote :

“ We are now living in one of the pleasantest parts of the town—a square from the State Capitol—and surrounded by trees of all kinds and the largest growth, and roses in greater profusion than I ever saw before. . . . A short distance from the house is the slough—formed by the backwater of the American River which unites with the Sacramento at this point—a beautiful sheet of water on which we have a boat, and over which we frequently sail. . . . Though I have a great deal of time on my hands, I do not think it is wholly lost. I employ it in the development of either body or mind, in rowing or swimming or in reading. Marriage has certainly benefited me by giving a more contented and earnest frame of mind, and will help me to do my best in ‘ whatever station it pleases God to call me.’ ”

Work on the newspaper was rather irregular. It depended on the transmission of news from the East. If the news did not come the paper did not appear. George had thus long spells of leisure. But when work was to be had he did not spare himself. Explaining his omission to write home for several weeks, he told his sisters :

“ I have been working steadily and literally nearly all the time. . . . Had not my necessities been so great, I would not have worked as I have during that time, for no one can do so for any time and retain good health.”

During periods of slackness he turned his hand to anything that offered. This brought him across the path of a

RUNAWAY MARRIAGE

famous figure. Mark Twain came to Sacramento to lecture, and George was employed to take the tickets at the hall door.

In November 1862 the first child of the marriage was born, a boy, called Henry after his father. By this time the Georges had given up "rooming" and started house-keeping. But whether from temperament or want of means, they seldom stayed long in one house. "We didn't clean house," said George afterwards; "we moved instead." For a time work on the paper was good, and George actually saved a little money, a rare thing for him. But he invested it in worthless mining shares and lost every cent. Not content with committing one folly, he proceeded to quarrel with his foreman and lost his job. In January 1864 the family was back in San Francisco without any means of livelihood. George fell back on "subbing," but work was so scarce that he was driven to try selling wringers on commission. Then Isaac Trump approached him with a proposal. The *Evening Journal*, George's old paper, had at last gone under, and there was a quantity of plant and type which could be acquired cheap. Trump's idea was to buy it and start a small job-printing office. George agreed and managed to raise the small sum which was his share of the capital. Another printer joined in, and the enterprise was launched. But George was never destined to be a successful business man. It was the story of the *Evening Journal* over again. The partners started their venture at a most inauspicious moment. A prolonged drought and a falling-off in the gold supply had spread depression through the state. Trade was bad and orders impossible to get. The partners slaved like niggers; they lived on 25 cents a day; they bartered printing for meat, milk, and firewood. Nothing was of the slightest use. The business went steadily downhill. Speaking of this period, George said afterwards:

"I came near starving to death, and at one time I was so close to it that I think I should have done so but for the job of printing a few cards which enabled us to buy a little corn meal. In this darkest time in my life my second child was born."

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

The baby, a boy called Richard, came on a bleak January morning in 1865. As soon as the doctor saw him he said, "Don't stop to wash the child; he is starving. Feed him." George overheard this remark and left the house in a desperate frame of mind.

"I walked along the street," he related afterwards, "and made up my mind to get money from the first man whose appearance might indicate that he had it to give. I stopped a man—a stranger—and told him I wanted five dollars. He asked me what I wanted it for. I told him that my wife was confined and that I had nothing to give her to eat. He gave me the money. If he had not, I think I was desperate enough to have killed him."

This was the lowest point touched by the family fortunes. Shortly afterwards things began to mend. A cheaper house was secured, and Mrs. George was able to meet part of the rent by sewing for the landlady. George extricated himself from the ill-fated partnership with Trump and went back to "subbing." In a little diary which he commenced at this time he surveyed his position and made good resolutions for the future.

"Feb. 17, 1865. I am starting out afresh, very much crippled and embarrassed, owing over 200 dollars. I have been unsuccessful in everything. I wish to profit by my experience and to cultivate those qualities necessary to success in which I have been lacking. I have not saved as much as I ought and am resolved to practice a rigid economy until I have something ahead.

1. To make every cent I can.
2. To spend nothing unnecessarily.
3. To put something by each week, if it is only a five cent piece borrowed for the purpose.
4. Not to run into debt if it can be avoided.
1. To endeavour to make an acquaintance and friend of every one with whom I am brought in contact.
2. To stay at home less and be more social.
3. To strive to think consecutively and decide quickly."

These resolutions in the Benjamin Franklin manner had a tonic effect on the drooping spirits of the young compositor

RUNAWAY MARRIAGE

and nerved him to take up once more his heavy burden. His constancy was rewarded. By the spring of 1865 he had managed to get his head above water. Work became more plentiful and wages were good. The grim spectre of want was laid for a time. Most important of all, George had discovered a new way of adding to his resources. He had begun to write for the press.

CHAPTER V

JOURNALISM AND POLITICS

SINCE his youth George had had an itch for scribbling, but hitherto his literary instincts had found no outlet except in letter-writing and the keeping of innumerable diaries. Now he resolved to put his turn for writing to a more regular and profitable use. His career as a professional writer may be said to date from the Saturday afternoon when he filled in the time waiting for his dinner by composing a little essay on "The Profitable Employment of Time." This youthful effort has survived. It begins with lamentations over the writer's wasted opportunities :

" The hours which I have idled away, though made miserable by the consciousness of accomplishing nothing, had been sufficient to make me master of almost any common branch of study. If, for instance I had applied myself to the practice of bookkeeping and arithmetic I might now have been an expert in those things ; or I might have had the dictionary at my fingers' ends ; been a practised and perhaps an able writer ; a much better printer ; or been able to read and write French, Spanish or any other modern language to which I might have directed my attention ; and the mastery of any of these things now would give me an additional appreciable power, and means by which to work to my end, not to speak of that which would have been gained by exercise and good mental habits."

But the essay ends on a more hopeful note. " "

" To sum up for the present, though this essay has hardly taken the direction and shape which at the outset I intended, it is evident to me that I have not employed the time and means at my command faithfully and advantageously as I might have done, and consequently that I have myself to blame for at

JOURNALISM AND POLITICS

least a part of my non-success. And this being true of the past, in the future like results will flow from like causes. I will therefore try (though as I know from experience, it is much easier to form good resolutions than to faithfully carry them out) to employ my mind in acquiring useful information or practice, when I have nothing leading more directly to my end and claiming my attention. When practicable, or when I cannot decide upon anything else, I will endeavour to acquire facility and elegance in the expression of my thought by writing essays or other matters which I will preserve for future comparison. And in this practice it will be well to aim at mechanical neatness and grace, as well as at proper and polished language."

To this determination George steadfastly adhered. Two days after he had written this essay he sent a long letter to the editor of a newly established trade union paper, and shortly afterwards a sketch of his, called "A Plea for the Supernatural," appeared in the *Californian*, a literary weekly which numbered Bret Harte and Mark Twain among its contributors. Following upon this a magnificent journalistic opportunity presented itself. On April 14, 1865, the news was flashed across the wires that President Lincoln had been shot in Ford's Theatre, Washington. The excitement in San Francisco, as in all American cities, rose to fever-heat. Next day George lent a hand in wrecking the offices of certain newspapers suspected of Southern sympathies, and then went home to write a short article on the tragedy. He sent it to the *Alta California*, the paper on which he happened to be setting type at the time, and it appeared with a note stating that it was the work of a compositor in the printing office. It was headed "*Sic Semper Tyrannis*," the words shouted by the assassin when he leapt on the stage after firing the fatal shot. To-day, its bombastic, inflated style reads strangely, but at the time the turgid rhetoric awoke a sympathetic response in the minds of its excited readers. The last paragraph will give some idea of its quality :

"*Sic semper tyrannis* ! Blazoned on the shield of a noble state¹ by the giants of the young republic, their degenerate

¹ Virginia.

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

sons shall learn its meaning ! The murderer's shout as Lincoln fell, it will be taken up by a million voices. Thus *shall* perish all who wickedly raise their hands to shed the blood of the defenders of the oppressed, and who strive by wickedness and cruelty to preserve and perpetuate wrong. Their names shall become a hissing and a reproach among men as long as the past shall be remembered ; and the great sin in whose support they spared no crime is numbered henceforth with the things that were. *Sic semper tyrannis ! Amen.*"

The article provoked much appreciative comment, and George followed it up with another on the character of Lincoln, which was printed as an editorial. Pleased with the young compositor's work, the editor commissioned him to write an account of the mourning decorations for the dead President. This was the first regular piece of journalistic work that George had received, and it seemed to bring him to the threshold of a new career. At last the clouds were lifting, and the young man saw before him a way of escape from the cramping environment of the composing room. Yet it is characteristic of George's utter lack of worldly wisdom that just at the moment when his prospects were brightening, he was prepared to throw all his chances away in the pursuit of a hare-brained adventure. An expedition was being organized in San Francisco to carry aid to the Mexican patriots fighting Napoleon III. and his puppet the Emperor Maximilian. The affairs of Mexico were no earthly concern of George's, yet he made up his mind to join the expedition, though it meant leaving his wife and children without any visible means of support. It says much for Mrs. George's loyalty that she consented to this crazy proposal. Fortunately, it came to nothing. An old ship was brought into San Francisco harbour on which the conspirators were to embark, but a federal cutter dropped anchor at the mouth and blocked the way out. This was the end of the enterprise. Among the filibusters were some of the choicest types of Californian ruffian, and it was George's opinion that the expedition might easily have degenerated into a pirate cruise. Indeed, in after years this episode was made the ground of a charge against George that he had once been a pirate.

JOURNALISM AND POLITICS

Towards the end of the year George got the offer of work on a State printing contract in Sacramento, and spent another twelve months in the State capital. During this time he did not neglect his writing. He regularly contributed letters to the chief Californian papers, and an article on an incident of the *Shubrick* voyage was published in the *Philadelphia Saturday Night*. Sacramento had a literary and debating society called the Lyceum. George attended its meetings and obtained some practice in the art of public speaking. All this time he was on the look-out for a regular journalistic appointment, and a half promise of a place on the staff of a new newspaper, the *Times*, drew him back to San Francisco at the end of 1866. The promise came to nothing, and George had to be content with a job in the composing room. But some of his articles were accepted from time to time and printed in the paper. The editor of the *Times*, Noah Brooks, was favourably impressed with the young man's work. One day he strolled into the composing room to have a look at him. He was shown a slight, bearded, undersized young man standing on a board to raise him to the height of his case. "I was not impressed with him," Brooks wrote later, "and little dreamed that there was a man who would one day win great fame—as little dreamed of it as no doubt he did."

After a little spell of waiting the wished-for opening came. George was appointed reporter on the *Times* at \$30 a week. Then with surprising swiftness unexpected promotion followed. In June 1867 Brooks resigned, and George was offered his place as managing editor at \$50 a week. Sudden advancements of this kind were common in Californian journalism in the eighteen-sixties. George held his new post for nearly a year. It was a comfortable one. He was making more money than he had ever done before, and he was gaining invaluable experience. But the swell-headed young fellow was not content with this. He demanded a rise in salary, and when it was refused, resigned, though he had no alternative work in prospect. Mrs. George's patience must almost have reached breaking-point. George, whose self-confidence had grown with the rapidity of the prophet's gourd, thought he could have

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

another newspaper job for the asking. He was sadly disappointed. Nothing offered except the editorship of a trumpery "rag," which George gave up after a few weeks after a quarrel with the proprietor. Months elapsed before he secured regular journalistic work, and his new post was none of the best. Nugent, proprietor of the *San Francisco Herald*, wished to secure admission to the Associated Press, the agency through which most of the Californian newspapers secured their eastern news. He commissioned George to go East and conduct the necessary negotiations. If admission was refused George was to try to organize an independent news service. The transcontinental railway was not finished at this time, and George crossed the plains in a "four-horse mud wagon." "I spent many nights," he related afterwards, "sitting at the driver's side, and I was all the more impressed, therefore, when we reached the railroad and got a sleeping-car. We had to sleep two in a berth, however."

After a flying visit to his parents at Philadelphia, George went on to New York and made formal application to the Associated Press for the admission of the *Herald*. This, after many vexatious delays, was refused, the other Californian newspapers being unwilling to share their privileges with a rival. Thereupon George set about organizing a private news service. With the assistance of John Hasson, one of his boyhood friends, he opened a Press bureau, first at Philadelphia and then at New York, and made an arrangement by which he secured access to the special dispatches of the *New York Herald*. These he telegraphed to San Francisco across the wires of the Western Union Company. Here a new difficulty arose. The rival Californian papers persuaded the Western to raise its charges to the *Herald*, while lowering them to the other users of the service. George's fiery nature boiled over at this unfair treatment. He had a stormy interview with the vice-president of the Western.

"I told him in very plain terms," he wrote to Nugent, "what I thought of his company and how this operation would appear to the public; that it was meant to crush the 'Herald' and would crush the 'Herald'; was meant to prevent any future

JOURNALISM AND POLITICS

opposition to the Associated Press and would do so until a new line was built ; that they had virtually agreed to give a monopoly of the news business to the Association for 40,000 dollars a year—less than they were now getting ; that I could not say what you would do, but that if it was my paper I would issue my last number on the 1st of May, declare that it was killed by the Western Union Telegraph Company, who had sold a monopoly to the other papers, fill it with the history of the whole transaction and print an immense edition which I would circulate all over the Union."

The vice-president answered with smooth words, but held out no hope that the company would alter its decision. Thereupon George resolved to carry out his threat of an appeal to the public. He drew up a lengthy account of what had happened, and sent it to the principal newspapers in the eastern states ; then he sat back and waited for the explosion. " You will hear thunder all around the sky," he wrote to a friend, " notwithstanding the influence of the Western Union and the Associated Press." Never was there a grosser miscalculation. Only one paper of any importance published George's protest, and the public remained quite unmoved by the recital of the wrongs of the *Herald*. It was George's first disagreeable experience of the impotence of the written word against the material force of associated capital. Greatly discouraged and dejected, he returned to San Francisco.

There further disappointment awaited him. Nugent, though he had been so ably served by his energetic lieutenant, gave him a very cool reception, and refused to pay up some arrears of salary and expenses until threatened with a legal action. Disgusted with this shabby treatment, George broke off his connection with the *Herald*. He worked at odd jobs for a time, occasionally being driven back to the composing room, until he was appointed editor of a small paper, the *Transcript*, published at Oakland, across the bay. While at Oakland an incident occurred which earned for him some publicity. One of the burning questions of the hour in California was the problem of Chinese labour. In this controversy George took the popular side. Rather surprisingly for one of his liberal

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

views, he favoured the imposition of restrictions on Chinese immigration. While he was in New York on the business of the *Herald* he published a long article on the subject in the *New York Tribune*, which caused a mild sensation, both in the East and the West. In picturesque language George explained to the New Yorkers the extent to which the Celestials had penetrated every branch of economic life in California.

“Stand, say at Clay and Sansome Streets, San Francisco, about six in the afternoon and you will see long lines of Chinamen coming from American workshops. Pass up Jackson, Pacific or Dupont Streets into their quarter, and you may see them at work on their own account. Beside the stall where the Chinese butcher carves his varnished hog or makes mince-meat of stewed fowl with a cleaver such as was used by his fathers long before our Saviour sent the Devil into the swine, you may see Chinamen running sewing-machines, rolling cigars or working up tin with the latest Yankee appliances. In front of the store window in which great clumsy paper clogs and glistening anklets are displayed, and through which you may watch the bookkeeper casting up his accounts on an abacus and entering them with a brush from right to left in his ledger, the Chinese cobbler sits half-soling and ‘heel-tapping’ ‘Melican’ boots. Underneath the Buddhist temple, a disciple of Confucius mends the time-pieces of the American Clock Company and repairs Waltham watches. In the Mail Steamship Company’s office, the Chinese clerk will answer your inquiries in the best of English. And in one of the principal drug-stores of Sacramento a Chinaman will put up a prescription for you, or if your taste runs in that way, in a saloon near by, a Chinaman will concoct for you a mint julep or whisky-cocktail; while wherever you go, in hotel or boarding-house, it is more than probable that hands better used to the chop-stick than the fork prepared the food you eat, let it be called by what high-sounding French phrase it may.”

This invasion of cheap yellow labour, George insisted, must of necessity bring down the level of wages on the Pacific Slope.

“It requires no argument to show that to take five dollars a day from five men and to divide it again between them and two more, would be a losing operation to the five.”

JOURNALISM AND POLITICS

George was here appealing to the wages-fund theory of the orthodox economists, according to which the amount of capital earmarked for the payment of wages at any time was a fixed amount, and any addition to the number of workers among whom it had to be divided would necessarily bring down the general rate.

Finally he dwelt at length on the threat to American civilization if so utterly alien a race were allowed to settle in large numbers in the United States.

“The Mongolians who are now coming among us on the other side of the continent differ from our own race by as strongly marked characteristics as do the negroes, while they will not so readily fall into our ways as the negroes. . . . The negro when brought to our country was a simple barbarian with nothing to unlearn; the Chinese have a civilization and history of their own; a vanity which causes them to look down on all other races, habits of thought rendered permanent by being stamped upon countless generations. From present appearances we shall have a permanent Chinese population . . . a population born in China, reared in China, expecting to return to China, living while here in a little China of its own, and without the slightest attachment to the country—utter heathens, treacherous, sensual, cowardly and cruel.”

This article gave great satisfaction to the anti-Chinese party in California. It was reprinted in several papers, and the Mechanics State Council, a working-class body, issued it as a separate pamphlet. George ventured to send a copy to John Stuart Mill, the leading economist at that time of the English-speaking world, with whose standard work he had made a cursory acquaintance while writing the article.¹ Mill, writing from Avignon, courteously acknowledged the communication.

“Concerning the purely economic view of the subject, I entirely agree with you,” he wrote. . . . “That the Chinese immigration if it attains great dimensions, must be economically injurious to the mass of the present population; that it

¹ “I went to the Philadelphia library,” said George, “looked over John Stuart Mill’s *Political Economy*, and accepting his views without question, based my article upon it.”

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

must diminish their wages and reduce them to a lower stage of physical comfort and well-being, I have no manner of doubt. . . .

"But," he went on, with the facile optimism of the nineteenth-century liberal, "there is much also to be said on the other side. Is it justifiable to assume that the character and habits of the Chinese are insusceptible of improvement? The institutions of the United States are the most potent means that have yet existed for spreading the most important elements of civilization down to the poorest and most ignorant of the labouring masses. If every Chinese child were compulsorily brought under your school system, or under a still more effective one if possible, and kept under it for a sufficient number of years, would not the Chinese population be in time raised to the level of the American?"

When this letter arrived George was editing the *Transcript* at Oakland. He immediately published it with an editorial underlining the admissions of the English economist, but paying a warm tribute to him as a writer and a philosopher. Mill's reputation was then at its height, and the respect with which he treated the arguments of the obscure Californian journalist was a useful advertisement for George and helped to strengthen his position in the newspaper world of the Pacific coast.

The publicity he acquired was profitable to him in another way. It introduced him to the stage of politics. The Democratic leaders in the State fixed their eyes on him as a likely recruit. Since his adolescence George had been a Republican. He had been a supporter of Lincoln and had voted for General Grant at the election of 1868. But the rapid deterioration of the Republican Party after the Civil War and its degeneration into a tool of big business had disgusted him, and he was now ready to welcome advances from the opposite political camp. Thus when the managers of the Democratic caucus in California offered him the editorship of the *Sacramento Reporter*, the chief party organ in the State, he at once accepted, and moved for the third time to the State capital to take up his new duties.

The leader of the Californian Democrats was Governor Haight, a man of character and ability, and like George, a converted Republican. The State elections were drawing

JOURNALISM AND POLITICS

near, and Haight determined to make the railway question the chief point in the Democratic programme. This was a subject in which George had for long taken a keen interest. Since he came to California he had followed closely the growth of the great railway systems which were linking up the Pacific with the East. He had stood in the crowd at Sacramento in 1863 when the first shovelful of earth was turned in the construction of the Central Pacific. He had joined in the national rejoicings in 1869 when the Central Pacific joined up with the Union Pacific at Ogden, Utah, and the dream of a transcontinental railway was at last realized. But all the time he was acutely conscious of some of the drawbacks associated with the new form of transport. In an early article, "What the Railroad will bring Us," he had predicted a fall in wages as a result of uniting California with the East. And while in New York in 1869 he had attacked Leland Stanford and other railway barons in the columns of the *Tribune* :

"So far as cheapening the cost of transportation is concerned, the Pacific Railroad has as yet been of no advantage to the people of the Pacific coast, who have to pay just as much as, and in some cases more than, when they relied on horse or ox flesh. There would be some excuse for this if the road had been constructed by private means; but it has been and is being built literally and absolutely by the money of the people, receiving liberal aid from cities, counties and State of California, as well as the immense gratuity of the general government. . . .

"But minor grievances sink into insignificance when the enormous political power which these great Pacific Railroad corporations can wield is considered. The Central Pacific can dictate to California, Nevada and Utah, and the Union Pacific to the states and territories through which it passes more completely than the Camden and Amboy dictated to New Jersey, and each or both will be able to exert an almost irresistible pressure upon Congress in any manner in which their interests are involved. I don't know about the Union Pacific, but the Central already influences conventions, manages legislatures, and has its representatives in both Houses at Washington. And it is already buying up other corporations and bids fair to own the whole railroad system of the Pacific."

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

The irony of the situation, as George pointed out, was that the railways had really been built by the public that was being fleeced. The companies had received enormous subsidies, 16,000 to 48,000 dollars for every mile of track, as well as thousands of acres of free land on each side of the railway line. Yet in return for all this generosity they had set themselves systematically to bleed the community. It was one of the most disgraceful ramps in American history.

The Democrats proposed, if returned, to curb the power of the railway barons, to reduce the swollen amount of their dotations from the public purse, and to give railway users some protection against exploitation. The case against the companies was so overwhelming that the party managers looked forward confidently to a sweeping electoral victory. George threw himself enthusiastically into the campaign. He wrote powerful editorials in the *Reporter*; he published a pamphlet on the railway question which was circulated as a party manifesto; he stood as candidate for the State legislature in one of the San Francisco districts. But against the colossus of the Central Pacific the flood of reason and argument broke helplessly. With unlimited powers of corruption at their command, the directors faced the contest without anxiety. The elections took place in the autumn of 1871. On the morning of the polling day George left his house in high spirits, anticipating a glorious triumph for his party. He returned in the evening looking slightly dashed, but with a twinkle of amusement in his eye. His wife asked how the results had gone. "Why," he replied almost with a shout, "we haven't even elected a constable!" The completeness of the disaster appealed to his sense of humour. But it was no laughing matter for him. Not only had his political ambitions received a decisive check. He had lost his means of livelihood as well. Following its usual methods, the Central Pacific had stepped in and bought up the *Sacramento Reporter*. George, who indignantly refused to conform to the new policy of the paper, was promptly sacked. Once more he had learned how impotent is the pen of the mere journalist against the grosser weapons wielded by the power of capital.

CHAPTER VI

THE GREAT DISCOVERY

WE now approach the period when George's thought on social questions begins to mature and clarify. The dream that had haunted his boyhood, the dream of great wealth rapidly acquired, had long since dissolved in the chilly atmosphere of real life. Short cuts to riches, he now realized, were not for him. He was not of the stuff of which millionaires are made. Probably this discovery strengthened his disposition to look with critical eyes on the system which distributed the good things of this life so unequally. Since his boyhood the great paradox of modern society had always been present to his mind. Why should deepening destitution follow every improvement in wealth production? Why should progress always be accompanied by poverty? Why should wealth and want go hand in hand? At intervals apparently trivial incidents had pressed these questions on his attention. He could recall the old printer in Philadelphia who told him that wages were always high in new countries and low in old ones. The boy had challenged this assertion as contrary to common sense, but on investigation had been compelled to admit its truth, though neither he nor his informant could think of any reason for it. Again, when he was on the schooner on his way to the Fraser River, he got into a discussion with some miners about Chinese immigrants.

"I ventured to ask what harm they were doing here, if, as these miners said, they were only working the cheap diggings. 'No harm now,' said an old miner, 'but wages will not always be so high as they are to-day in California. As the country grows, as people come in, wages will go down, and some time

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

or other, white men will be glad to get those diggings that the Chinamen are now working."

These words rushed into his mind when he was sitting one evening in the gallery of the theatre in San Francisco. A new drop curtain had just fallen on which was painted what was then an unrealized dream—the overland express coming into San Francisco. The audience sprang to their feet and cheered. George shouted with the rest, but then he began to reflect.

"What good is it going to be to men like me—to those who have nothing but their labour? I saw that thought grow and grow. We were all—all of us, rich and poor—hoping for the development of California, proud of her future greatness, looking forward to the time when this great empire of the west would count her population by millions. And underneath it all came to me what that miner on the topsail schooner going up to Fraser River had said. 'As the country grows, as people come in, wages will go down.'"

Some of these misgivings were expressed by George in the article already referred to, "What the Railroad will bring Us." Yet, though he clearly realized the problem, the solution completely baffled him, until one momentous afternoon an idea flashed into his mind like an inspiration from on high. It was while he was editing the *Transcript* at Oakland. He had taken up riding, and had gone off for a canter on his little tan-coloured mustang. What followed can be related in his own words :

"Absorbed in my thoughts, I had driven the horse into the hills until he panted. Stopping for breath, I asked a passing teamster for want of something better to say, what land was worth there. He pointed to some cows grazing so far off that they looked like mice and said, 'I don't know exactly, but there is a man over there who will sell some land for a thousand dollars an acre.' Like a flash it came upon me that there was the reason of advancing poverty with advancing wealth. With the growth of population, land grows in value, and the men who work it must pay more for the privilege. I turned back, amidst quiet thought, to the perception that then came to me, and has been with me ever since."

THE GREAT DISCOVERY

It may seem a little surprising that this discovery should have been so long delayed. In California, as in all new countries, questions connected with the land were of the deepest interest to the community. They formed the staple of politics, and bulked largely in public discussion. Nearly all the great fortunes in the State had been acquired by gambling in land values. When George took his momentous ride over the hills the proposal to extend the Central Pacific line to Oakland had started a land boom in the neighbourhood. It was only one of many in the history of the State. Of ways of making money in California, the least sure, despite current belief, was gold mining. The exorbitant charges made for the necessities of life in the mining districts ate away the successful miner's gains. The safest and most certain was land speculation. Every influx of population pushed land values higher. In the early days of San Francisco the arrival of a ship in the harbour often doubled the price of lots in the centre of the town. The land speculator had only to hold on long enough to get his money returned to him a hundredfold. The San Francisco palaces which covered the aristocratic slopes of Nob Hill were not built by successful miners. They were the homes of fortunate dealers in real estate.

For long George remained blind to the significance of all this. The pattern of social as of physical facts is sometimes hard to discern. "There are pictures," wrote George later in *Progress and Poverty*, "which though looked at again and again, present only a confused labyrinth of lines or scroll work—a landscape, trees or something of the kind—until once the attention is called to the fact that these things make up a face or figure. This relation, once recognized, is always afterwards clear." Something of the kind had happened in his own case. For years he had studied the facts of social life without being able to discover the order and unity beneath them. Now he realized their connection with each other, their relation to a single great principle. The cause of social disharmony stood plainly revealed to the view. It was the private ownership of land.

For about a couple of years George kept turning this idea over in his mind. Then in 1871 he resolved to give it

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

to the world. While in the thick of the electoral campaign against the railways he sat down and composed a little pamphlet entitled *Our Land and Land Policy*. It was George's first important publication. It contained the germs of the philosophy he elaborated later in *Progress and Poverty*.

This booklet, which has now a considerable scarcity value, gave, to begin with, a clear explanation of the significance of the frontier in American history, a subject less well understood then than now. In the abundant free land of the West the American system had a safety-valve which preserved it from the crises and depressions of the Old World. But the safety-valve was beginning to jam. The country was filling up, and soon there would be no unoccupied land left. George hazarded the guess that about 1890 all the free land would be gone, a forecast that proved astonishingly correct. This is the date usually accepted by American historians as marking the end of the frontier. In that year the Census Report stated: "The unsettled area has been so broken into by isolated bodies of settlement that there can hardly be said to be a frontier line." With the disappearance of free land, George went on to explain, private ownership of the soil would begin to exert its evil influence. Already its effects were being felt in the older settled districts where individuals and corporations (he was thinking mainly of railway companies) had been allowed to monopolize hundreds of thousands of acres, depriving the private citizen of access to the great storehouse of nature. When landowner and landless man face each other, only one result can follow. The landless man must pay the landowner for permission to work. The bigger the population and the keener the demand for the soil, the higher the price that must be paid for it and the less the labourer has left over for his own maintenance. Thus rent and wages always move in opposite directions. In a new country where land is plentiful and labour scarce, wages are high and rent is low. The contrary prevails in an old country where land is scarce and labour is plentiful. Here we have the key to the great social enigma, the explanation why progress and poverty are inseparable companions. As

THE GREAT DISCOVERY

a country fills up, as the output of wealth increases, a larger and larger share of the fruits of labour is absorbed by the landowner. The monopolization of land is the fundamental cause of low wages, poverty, and unemployment.

How is this social disease to be cured? In the remedies he proposed at this time, George was a little less radical than he afterwards became. He advocated a tax on land, but this tax was not to be a *single* tax, nor was it to absorb the whole rent of the landowner. At this stage George was not prepared to condemn private property in land outright. Without it, he believed the soil could not be exploited properly. But what he did denounce was land monopoly. The ownership of the soil must be diffused, not concentrated. It must be in the hands of a large number of small owners, not a small number of large owners. Taxes on land would promote this. They would kill land speculation and help to break up large landed properties. Incidentally, they would relieve trade and industry from part of the burden which the State placed on them. But that was less important than their effect in diffusing land ownership and giving the mass of the community free access to the soil. Free land would raise wages, reduce poverty, and banish unemployment.

How far is George's thesis original? This question, around which considerable controversy has raged, can be briefly disposed of. In the sense of being entirely new, neither George's diagnosis nor his remedy is original. The charge that land monopoly was the root cause of poverty and the proposal to cure it by land taxation had been made by many earlier social thinkers. It is only necessary to mention the French Physiocrats, the German Boden-reformers, and English writers like Thomas Spence, William Ogilvie, and Patrick Dove. But in the sense that it was arrived at by independent thinking, without indebtedness to any forerunner, George's thesis is his own. At this time he had done little reading in economics, and he had certainly never studied the obscure writers whom he was afterwards accused of plagiarizing. As he himself said, "I was led to think a good deal before I had a chance to do much read-

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

ing." In a further sense, George's claim to originality may be sustained. He was the first to popularize the notion that the land was the source of our social evils. In the writings of his predecessors this idea was expressed, but it was buried beneath masses of tedious verbiage. George placed it in the clear light of day and revealed its significance to the world. Rather unfairly, the charge of plagiarism followed him all his life. He met it invariably with the same answer. If other thinkers had arrived by a different road at the same conclusion as himself, that was only additional testimony to its truth. Thus when shortly after the publication of *Our Land and Land Policy* a lawyer friend met him in the street and told him that his ideas had been anticipated by the French Physiocrats, he was not in the least disconcerted. He accepted it as a piece of encouraging news.

"I forget many things," he wrote afterwards, "but the place where I heard this, and the tones and attitude of the man who told me of it, are photographed on my memory. For when you have seen a truth that those around you do not see, it is one of the deepest of pleasures to hear of others who have seen it. This is true even though those others were dead years before you were born."

Our Land and Land Policy did not attract much attention. About a thousand copies were sold; but the reviewers were coldly critical, and the public showed no enthusiasm for the new social philosophy. George decided that the work must be done over again when he could find time to survey the problem more thoroughly. For the moment, the necessity of earning his daily bread left him no leisure for connected thought on social problems.

Journalism was now George's profession, so far as he had one, and at the end of 1871 he launched what was probably the most successful of his many journalistic ventures. With the aid of two printer friends he established a little evening newspaper, the *San Francisco Evening Post*. It was quite a small affair, a single sheet of four pages. But it sold for a cent, which was a novelty in San Francisco, and it specialized in spicy comment on current affairs. The *Post* made a point of exposing every public scandal

THE GREAT DISCOVERY

and voicing every popular grievance. The venality of politicians, the graft of municipal administrators, the corruption of the police, the mismanagement of public institutions, the flagrant vice of the Chinese quarter—all these supplied George with plentiful material for pungent editorials. The *Post* tirelessly lashed the legal authorities who connived at breaches of the law, and the powerful or wealthy criminals whom the laxity of the police allowed to escape just punishment. On one occasion it succeeded in bringing to justice a captain and mate by whose brutality three members of their crew had been driven to commit suicide. It gave George peculiar satisfaction to secure justice for the common sailor, of whose sufferings he knew something at first hand.

All this was not without risk. In San Francisco men carried arms, and the hired assassin still plied his trade. The journalist who attacked public abuses went with his life in his hands. "One editor was shot dead while I was there," wrote Robert Louis Stevenson in 1879. "Another walked the streets accompanied by a bravo, his guardian angel." George disdained such protection. Unarmed, he penetrated into an industrial school with an evil reputation. The superintendent, a great hulking brute, was waiting for him at the gate with a pistol. George coolly stared the ruffian in the eyes and pushed past. Another time, in his office, he struck a man twice his size, the friend of a wealthy murderer whom the *Post* was advising the mob to lynch. Again, in a café, a friend of the chief of police, whose delinquencies George was exposing, drew a revolver on him, but fortunately a bystander struck up the barrel and the shot which might have cut short a useful career was never fired.

All this notoriety helped to increase the circulation of the *Post*, and it was gradually increased to the size of a normal newspaper. Its finances, however, were still precarious, and outside aid had to be invoked. A Nevada senator, Jones by name, was persuaded to put \$48,000 into the enterprise. At once the sanguine editor began making plans for a morning daily and an illustrated Sunday newspaper. But all these schemes were knocked on the

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

head when Jones suddenly demanded his money back. The *Post* was in no position to pay, and the only solution was to surrender the paper in satisfaction of the debt. George, hot-tempered as usual, proposed scuttling the *Post* rather than let Jones have it, but he was overruled by his more cautious partners. At the close of 1875 he found himself once more at a loose end.

At this juncture his political connection came in useful. He had retained his membership of the Democratic Party, had served as a member of the Californian delegation at the National Convention at Baltimore, and had done much to secure the return of the Democratic candidate for the governorship at the Californian State elections of 1875. This gave him a claim on the good offices of the party, and when his connection with the *Post* came to an end he applied to the new governor for some public office which would leave him leisure for thinking and writing. His request was granted. In January 1876 he was appointed State Inspector of Gas Meters.

This rather curious office had been instituted for the protection of gas consumers. It was the inspector's duty to test all gas meters throughout the State and see that they registered properly. The procedure was simple. A measured quantity of air was forced through each meter, and a small brass seal was affixed to those that satisfied the test. The inspector received no regular salary, but he charged a small fee for each meter tested. During the next few years George travelled a good deal up and down the State in discharge of his duties.

For some time his family life had been interrupted. When he went East on Nugent's business he sent his wife and children to his parents in Philadelphia, and there they remained until the improvement in his material circumstances following the success of the *Post* allowed him to bring them back to California. This was not until 1873. A daughter, Jennie, had been born in 1867; the youngest child, Anna, was born ten years later. Back in San Francisco the Georges moved from house to house, the nomadic habit being deeply ingrained in them. Want, it must be confessed, was never far away from this unfortunate

THE GREAT DISCOVERY

family. For this the careless temperament of the father must bear the chief blame. George simply did not know the meaning of economy. Whenever he found himself in possession of a little surplus cash he could not keep it. He would "blow" it on some luxury like horse riding, or put it into mining shares with the usual result. Thus there was never much comfort in the George home. The family house was generally an inconvenient one. The rooms were only partially furnished. Mrs. George had to do the housework with her own hands. The children enjoyed few of the advantages of a middle-class home. They were educated at free schools and taken away at an early age. Nevertheless no murmur of complaint ever reached the ears of the head of the household. Like many a wilful son, George was a stern father, and the family discipline was perfect. "From either parent," records the eldest son, "a request was a command, with corporal punishment swiftly following delay or delinquency." Over his wife George had long since established a complete ascendancy. There is a revealing sentence in one of his letters to her which sheds a flood of light on their relations :

"I always have felt towards you a good deal as Abelard must have felt towards Heloise—as though you were my pupil as well as my wife."

Yet despite his hot temper and authoritarian disposition George knew how to secure the affection of his dependents. Such men usually do. To his wife, when away from home, he wrote tender little love letters, with sentiments like the following :

"You are to me prettier, more loving and more tempting than when you were a little delicate slip of a girl."

And with his children he practised all the arts that endear grown-ups to youngsters.

"There was an utter absence of anything that was stiff or pompous," writes his son. "He could work with his boys over a toy boat in the yard, and then go and help sail it ;

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

unbend to his older girl and talk doll and party until her eyes shone; sing and 'coo' to the new baby and call her 'Sunshine.' "

In the evenings he read aloud to the family, especially poetry, for which he and his wife had retained a taste since their courtship days. The children were encouraged to listen, and for this purpose they were excused home lessons, George holding that the regular school hours were long enough. If visitors came, the children were allowed to sit up and listen to the general conversation. The son-biographer records the result with obvious satisfaction :

" The children might constantly fail in the school lessons they were expected to study at home, but if asked could recite from Tennyson, Browning or Macaulay, had heard of the buried cities of Egypt and Yucatan, and in their own way could talk about the rotation of crops, the forms of water or the nebular hypothesis."

During these years George continued loyal to the Democratic Party, and placed his services at its disposal whenever needed. He worked actively for Tilden, the Democratic candidate at the presidential election of 1876. This seems to have been the first time when he succeeded in impressing his fellow-citizens with his powers of speech. The Democratic caucus recognized his abilities as an orator, chose him to stump the State, and circulated one of his speeches as a campaign document. Tilden was beaten by a small majority, but George was perfectly satisfied with his own achievements in the fight. To his mother he wrote :

" Personally what I accomplished was very gratifying. I have shown that I could make myself felt without a newspaper and shown that I possessed other ability than that of the pen. I always felt that I possessed the requisites for a first class speaker. If I live I shall make myself known, even in Philadelphia. I aim high."

Obviously his ambition was spreading its wings.

About this time his fellow-citizens began to take a little

THE GREAT DISCOVERY

more notice of him, and he was chosen to officiate at one or two public functions in San Francisco. His growing reputation as a speaker led to his being selected as orator at the Independence Day celebrations of 1877. George delivered a striking address on "The American Republic," concluding with a dithyramb in praise of liberty, of which he thought so highly that he reproduced most of it in *Progress and Poverty* (bk. x., chap. 5). It has since been reprinted in several American prose anthologies. But the large audience packed into the San Francisco theatre on a sultry July afternoon was in no mood to appreciate George's rhetorical periods. They found the speech too long, and a jaded reporter took his revenge next day by stating caustically: "The gas measurer kindly spoke for several hours on the goddess of liberty and other school-reader topics." An equal failure to impress his audience attended George's efforts to explain to the teachers and students of the University of California the true nature of political economy. There was a proposal about this time to establish a chair of economics, and George's name was mentioned as a possible nominee, his previous studies and writings making him probably as well qualified to teach the subject as any one else on the Pacific coast. He was invited to lecture before the University at Berkeley. But what chances he had he completely destroyed by the line he took in his address. Not content with attacking the orthodox economists for their verbal hair-splitting and their indifference to social problems, he went on to criticize the education usually given in universities.

"A monkey with a microscope, a mule packing a library, are fit emblems of the men—and unfortunately they are plenty—who pass through the whole educational machinery and come out but learned fools crammed with knowledge which they cannot use."

This criticism may have been just, but it was neither the time nor the place to give it expression, and it is not surprising that George did not get the appointment. He was disappointed. He told his wife that there was no title in the world he cared to have save that of professor. So little

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

do men sometimes realize their proper vocation. But he soon got over his disappointment, and addressed himself to the long-delayed task of developing the ideas he had sketched in *Our Land and Land Policy*. On September 18, 1877, his diary contains the brief but significant entry: "Commenced *Progress and Poverty*."

CHAPTER VII

" PROGRESS AND POVERTY "

THE writing of *Progress and Poverty* occupied George during the eighteen months from September 1877 to March 1879. The external incidents of his life during this period were few and unimportant. He lectured from time to time. He addressed the Young Men's Hebrew Association on "Moses," painting a glowing picture of the great Jewish lawgiver, and eulogizing his provision for a jubilee redistribution of land which cut at the root of monopoly. This later became one of his most popular lectures, and was frequently redelivered in after years. He also attended the meetings of the Land Reform League, which had been founded by a small group of journalists and lawyers interested in his ideas and anxious to spread a knowledge of them. Under the auspices of the League, George spoke in the Metropolitan Temple on "Why Work is Scarce, Wages Low, and Labour Restless." The meeting was intended to be the first of a series in favour of land reform. But the great hall was half empty, and the enthusiasm of the audience tepid. The press treated the movement with contempt, and the campaign fizzled out.

In 1879 George made another excursion into the political field. The Californian legislature had decided on a revision of the State constitution. George offered himself as a candidate to the special convention to be elected for this purpose. This time his chances were good. He had the Democratic nomination. And his anti-Chinese articles commended him to the Californian Working-men's Party, whose leader Dennis Kearney, drayman and demagogue, was then at the height of his influence. George, however, took a high line regarding the independence of candidates,

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

and when asked at a meeting whether he subscribed to the programme of the Working-men's Party, shouted an indignant "No." His reply was received with a storm of hisses. Kearney at once struck him off his list of candidates and his chances were gone. A little more pliability would have saved him. Nearly all Kearney's men were elected. But George was constitutionally indisposed to compromise. He went to the poll and did better than the other Democratic candidates. But he was not elected.

A light purse, says the Arabian proverb, makes a heavy heart, and George's despondency at this time was deepened by financial troubles. The income from the gas inspectorship had fallen away to nothing. George had tested nearly all the available gas meters in California. Writing and lecturing brought in a little, but not sufficient to meet the deficit in the household budget. George was driven to borrow from his friends. He started the year 1878 in debt to the tune of \$450, and shortly afterwards was compelled to pawn his watch to raise some ready money. In these distressing circumstances, harassed by duns and tormented by worldly cares, George wrote the book that made him famous.

Most of it was composed in a house in First Street, near the harbour. For his study George had a comfortable three-windowed room with a fine view of the bay. Furniture as usual was scarce, but the walls were lined with the eight hundred volumes he had managed to collect since his marriage. Here day after day he wrestled with the difficulties of the written word. His son has left a pleasant picture of him at work :

"Entering his library, one might witness the author, slightly inclined over an ample table in the centre of the room, writing on his book. Perhaps wearing a little house jacket, he sat, one hand holding the paper, the other moving a soft gold pen over it. And as he roused at sound of your entrance and turned and sank back, with one arm still on the table, the other thrown over the back of his chair, he raised a countenance not to be forgotten—a slight smile on the lips, a glow in the cheeks, tense thought in the brow and a gleam in the deep blue eyes that looked straight through and beyond you, as if to rest on the world of visions of the pure in heart."

“ PROGRESS AND POVERTY ”

To one of George's nervous temperament, prolonged sedentary labour was a trial. But by sheer force of will he kept himself at his task. He rose each morning at seven and had a cold bath. After breakfast he smoked a cigar, scanned the newspapers, and read some poetry to refresh his mind. Then he retired to his study and applied himself to the labours of the day. Most of his reading and thinking he did reclining on a couch, a favourite position of his, but sometimes under the stress of intellectual excitement he would jump to his feet and pace up and down the room. As a reader, he practised the art of skimming, so invaluable to the intellectual worker, and in this way he was able to tear the heart out of many volumes. For the first time he went systematically through the classics of the orthodox political economy, and made himself familiar with the great principles of the science. The labour of composition cost him much effort. He found it hard to shake off the desultory habits of the journalist. But as a writer he did not spare himself. Unremittingly he applied the labour of the file. He polished and repolished. He wrote and rewrote. Portions of the manuscript were circulated among the members of the Land Reform League, and their criticisms were carefully weighed and considered. For help of this kind George was indebted most of all to his closest friend in California, Dr. Edward Taylor, a lawyer whose acquaintance he had made during the Haight campaign. Taylor read all the manuscript, and all the proofs when the book was printed. On the flyleaf of his complimentary copy George wrote that it was presented “ in token of feelings which it could but poorly symbolize were it covered with gold and crusted with diamonds.”

As the work progressed George became convinced that he was writing a book that would make history. He had always regarded his task as a religious mission. Years before, he had resolved to dedicate himself to the service of mankind.

“ Once,” he wrote in an intimate letter, “ in daylight and in a city street, there came to me a thought, a vision, a call—give it what name you please. But every nerve quivered. And there and then I made a vow. Through evil and through

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

good, whatever I have done and whatever I have left undone, to that I have been true. It was that that impelled me to write *Progress and Poverty*."

The incident to which George referred occurred in New York in 1869. His conversion was as sudden as that of St. Paul's on the road to Damascus, and like the great apostle he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. He felt he had a truth to reveal, a gospel to preach, a way of salvation to make plain. It had been reserved for him to lead his fellow-men out of economic bondage, and in *Progress and Poverty* he was tracing the route to the Promised Land. The thought went to his brain. In a mood of growing exaltation he brought the work to a conclusion, and when it was finished his excitement was almost uncontrollable. On a March evening, at midnight, he wrote the last lines in the solitude of his study. Deep waves of emotion swept over him, till at last his nerves snapped beneath the strain. Throwing himself on his knees, he buried his head in his hands, and the grown man sobbed and wept like a child.

The issue of George's travail was that rare thing in the publishing world, an economic best-seller. Since its publication over two million copies of *Progress and Poverty* have been sold, and it has been translated into at least a dozen languages. It owed this unprecedented success to the vigour of its style, the clearness of its exposition, and the attractiveness of its message. The "rhetorical confectionery" which Huxley declared to be the chief blemish of the book did not detract from its popularity. George, it is true, carried into his writing some of the tricks and artifices of the public speaker. Like Burke, he was an orator with a pen in his hand. His purple passages are better suited to the platform than to the cold pages of print. But the majority of his readers were not sufficiently instructed to detect these lapses from taste, or if they did, readily forgave them in consideration of the ease and lucidity with which George made plain the abstruse truths of economics. In this respect *Progress and Poverty* set a new fashion. It was one of the earliest and best popu-

“ PROGRESS AND POVERTY ”

larizers of political economy. It made the dismal science interesting, rescued it from the charge of being a mere gospel of despair, and brought it from the study and the lecture-room into the street and the market-place. George's services in this connection have rarely received from professional economists the recognition which they deserve.

At the same time, *Progress and Poverty* has its faults. The order of exposition leaves something to be desired. Somewhat pedantically, George set off by considering and refuting explanations of poverty opposed to his own. Thus the impatient reader is led through page after page on Malthusianism and the Wages Fund Theory before he reaches the kernel of the book and learns what George is really after. This was running a serious risk. So few authors are read after their first chapter. A more prudent writer would have put the original part of the book under the reader's nose, and not left him to discover it after a weary journey through a wilderness strewn with the bones of dead economic theories.

Another defect of the book is its length. The vice of George's style was prolixity. He did not always realize the difference between the written and the spoken word. Moreover, he had the rationalist's ambition to leave nothing unexplained. "The art of writing," said Montesquieu, "is to skip the intermediate ideas." George never acquired the invaluable tact of omission. The book contains much irrelevant matter. It was hardly necessary to introduce chapters on the theory of human progress and the ethics of conduct into what was primarily an economic treatise. He had given his readers quite enough to think about without bemusing them with these hoary problems.

The object of *Progress and Poverty* was to prove, by an appeal to the principles of economic science, the thesis already asserted in *Our Land and Land Policy*; namely, that "land being necessary to labour and being reduced to private ownership, every increase in the productive power of labour increases rent—the price that labour must pay for the opportunity to utilize its powers; thus all the advantages gained by the march of progress go to the

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

owners of land, and wages do not increase.”¹ This contention had been little more than stated in *Our Land and Land Policy*. It was now to be buttressed by an exposition of the laws of political economy. The real significance of these laws had escaped the professional economists. They, simple men, had believed that their science justified the existing order. They were to be roughly disillusioned. Like Marx, George turned the guns of the classical economy on the fortress they were supposed to defend. Like Marx, he marched against the established order over the imposing bridge of the Ricardian economics. And like Marx, he found that the weapons which he wrested from the champions of capitalism broke in his hands.

The theory of *Progress and Poverty* takes as its starting-point the Ricardian law of rent, according to which “the rent of land is determined by the excess of its produce over that which the same application can secure from the least productive land in use.”² Thus if in a country there are two qualities of land, A and B, and if it costs 20s. to raise a bushel of wheat on B and only 15s. on A, then farms on A will earn a surplus of 5s. a bushel. But the farmers will not be allowed to retain this. It will be collared by the landowner. If there is competition for farms on A land, then farmers bidding against each other will offer higher and higher rents until the whole surplus has been transferred to the landlord. According to Ricardo, the surplus *is* the rent. If an acre of A land produces 20 bushels of wheat, then the rent is £5 per acre. B land pays no rent, because it earns no surplus. Ricardo was wrong here, but George did not detect the error. To his own undoing, he followed blindly in the footsteps of the classical economist. Rent, then, is determined by the margin of cultivation. If population increases in our hypothetical country and inferior land C has to be ploughed up, where it costs 25s. to raise a bushel of wheat, then the price must rise to 25s. and B land will earn a surplus of 5s. a bushel, while the surplus on A land will rise to 10s. a bushel. Thus increasing population pushes out the margin

¹ *Progress and Poverty* (52nd Anniversary Edition), p. 201.

² *Ibid.*, p. 121.

“ PROGRESS AND POVERTY ”

of cultivation and swells the rent of the landowner. This, said George, has “ the self-evident character of a geometric axiom.”¹

Next, parting company here with Ricardo, George tried to prove that the margin of cultivation fixed not only rent but wages, profits, and interest as well; in other words, it determined the distribution of the whole national income. First, as regards wages. The labourer’s remuneration is fixed by what he can earn on land to which he has access without paying rent; that is, on land on the margin of cultivation. As the margin extends to inferior lands, wages must fall. They therefore move in the opposite direction to rent. The labourer in a modern industrial community may well ask where is the free land to which he has access. To George the unreality of this hypothesis was concealed by the fact that in the America of his time land could still be had for nothing—if the industrial worker was prepared to travel some hundreds or thousands of miles to it from his factory. Next, as regards profits. George solved this problem in a simple way. Profits are merely the employer’s wages, his wages of superintendence. They differ in degree but not in kind from the worker’s earnings, and therefore, like them, they are determined by the margin of cultivation. In this summary fashion he reconciled the interests of capital and labour, and disposed of the theory of the class war. The question of interest was a harder nut to crack. George’s explanation of it is one of the most curious pieces of reasoning in the book. Briefly, his theory is that interest is paid because some forms of wealth have reproductive power. If I buy a herd of cattle, I will probably have more cattle after twelve months than when I began. But if I buy a steam hammer it will not produce a brood of little steam hammers. Why then should capital invested in steam hammers earn interest? Because, says George, wealth is interchangeable. If I have £1,000, I can buy either steam hammers or cattle, but I will not buy steam hammers unless I can get as big a return on my money as if I had bought cattle. Therefore the owners of reproductive capital must sacrifice some of their surplus in

¹ *Progress and Poverty* (52nd Anniversary Edition), p. 121.

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

order that the owners of dead capital may receive an income. Why? George does not explain, except to say that in some mysterious way there is a general averaging out of benefits so that the owners of reproductive capital get less than they should and the owners of dead capital get more. Apparently, this takes place like the averaging out of profits in Marx's theory—"behind the backs of the producers." George does not condescend to details. But he regards this as a satisfactory explanation why all kinds of capital, unproductive as well as reproductive, earn interest. He does not stop here. Capital, he alleges, is the product of labour. It is stored up labour, so to speak. And so interest is just another form of wages, and like wages, is determined by the margin of cultivation.

George, then, has done what he set out to do. He has proved the identity of interest of labourers, employers, and capitalists. Their remuneration is in every case a reward of effort, and in every case they are robbed by the landowner.

"The wealth produced in every community is divided into two parts by what may be called the rent line, which is fixed by the margin of cultivation, or the return which labour and capital could obtain from such natural opportunities as are free to them without the payment of rent. From the part of the produce below this line, wages and interest must be paid. All that is above goes to the owners of land."¹

It follows that, as population increases and the margin of cultivation shoots out, rent rises but wages, profits, and interest fall. Labour and capital are not antagonists. They are partners in affliction.

"The Boston collar manufacturer who pays his girls two cents an hour may commiserate their condition, but he, as they, is governed by the law of competition, and cannot pay more and carry on his business."²

It is the landlord not the capitalist who is the enemy.

¹ *Progress and Poverty* (52nd Anniversary Edition), pp. 123-24.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 253-54.

“ PROGRESS AND POVERTY ”

The nineteenth century was an age of invention. Did improvements in production and the cheapening of goods not ease the lot of the labourer? George says “No.” Inventions merely increase the demand for land and send up rent. It is true that, theoretically, the extension of the margin may sometimes be less than the increase in productive power, and in that case the benefits of improvement will be shared between landowner and labourer. But this will seldom happen because of *land speculation*. Speculators hold up land for a rise, and thus the margin of cultivation is carried past good land to inferior land. Rents are artificially raised and wages artificially decreased. Incidentally, this is the cause of industrial depressions. Employers and labourers, disgusted by the fall in their remuneration, cease to produce, and the depression does not lift until the normal rent line and the speculative rent line come together again.

George’s analysis is now complete. The cause of poverty is rent, which sucks up like a sponge the wealth produced by the industrious classes.

“ It is not from the produce of the past that rent is drawn ; it is from the produce of the present. It is a toll levied on labour constantly and continuously. Every blow of the hammer, every stroke of the pick, every thrust of the shuttle, every throb of the steam-engine, pay it tribute. It levies upon the earnings of the men who, deep underground, risk their lives, and of those who over white surges hang to reeling masts ; it claims the just reward of the capitalist and the fruits of the inventor’s patient effort ; it takes little children from play and from school, and compels them to work before their bones are hard or their muscles are firm ; it robs the shivering of warmth ; the hungry of food ; the sick of medicine ; the anxious of peace. It debases and embrothers and embitters. It crowds families of eight and ten into a single squalid room ; it herds like swine agricultural gangs of boys and girls ; it fills the gin palace and groggery with those who have no comfort in their homes ; it makes lads who might be useful men candidates for prisons and penitentiaries ; it fills brothels with girls who might have known the pure joy of motherhood ; it sends greed and all evil passions prowling through society as a hard winter drives the wolves to the abodes of men ; it darkens faith in the human soul, and across the reflection of a

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

just and merciful Creator draws the veil of a hard and blind and cruel fate.”¹

Having discovered the cause of poverty, the remedy is obvious.

“Poverty deepens as wealth increases, and wages are forced down while productive power grows, because land, which is the source of all wealth and the field of all labour, is monopolized. To extirpate poverty, to make wages what justice commands they should be, the full earnings of the labourer, we must therefore substitute for the individual ownership of land a common ownership. Nothing else will go to the cause of the evil—in nothing else is there the slightest hope.”²

How is this remedy to be applied? To begin with, are the dispossessed landowners to be compensated? “No,” said George, and that for two reasons. First, private property in land is a social evil comparable to slavery and has no moral claim to compensation. Second, to indemnify the landowner would mean perpetuating the evil which it is sought to abolish.

“To buy up individual property rights would merely be to give the landholders in another form a claim of the same kind and amount that their possession of land now gives them; it would be to raise for them by taxation the same proportion of the earnings of labour and capital that they are now enabled to appropriate by rent.”³

In George’s view the landlords absorb all the surplus wealth of society. It would therefore be clearly impracticable to compensate them in the proper sense of the word without perpetuating the spoliation of the other classes of society.

One practical difficulty is thus cleared out of the way. The expropriation of the landlords will cost the State nothing. Now we approach the most original and ingenious part of George’s scheme. The destruction of private

¹ *Progress and Poverty* (52nd Anniversary Edition), p. 259.

² *Ibid.*, p. 234.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

“ PROGRESS AND POVERTY ”

property in land had hitherto seemed necessarily to involve some scheme of land nationalization, with a State department managing the land and a host of administrative difficulties. Nothing of this would be necessary, said George. Let the government levy a hundred per cent. tax upon rent, and the landowners' sponge would be squeezed dry into the coffers of the State. The wealth of which society is unjustly deprived would be restored to it. Such a tax would yield so large a revenue that other taxes could be dispensed with. It would then become a *single tax*, payable only by landowners, and trade and industry would be relieved from heavy burden. Exploitation would become impossible. There would be no opportunity to draw an income without working for it. Poverty and social injustice would disappear from modern civilization.

Where is the weak link in this chain of reasoning? It is in the assumption that land is the only form of wealth that can be monopolized. What about capital? Capital is scarce as well as land, and the capitalist is a monopolist. Interest is the toll that he levies on producers. The employer too is a monopolist, because he owns or controls that scarce commodity, capital, without which modern industry could not be carried on. His profits represent more than the wages of superintendence. If they did not, few employers would care to continue in business. The presumption that labour and capital have exactly the same interests is utterly false, as the records of industrial warfare abundantly prove. The *reductio ad absurdum* of George's theory, of course, is the conclusion to which it logically leads, that only landowners can become rich men. What of the Vanderbilts, Carnegies, and Rockefellers? What of the millions made out of steel and oil, railways and steamships? George could hardly deny that there were sources of great fortunes other than land. He remembered how the Californian railways had bled the community. But he assumed that such monopolistic enterprises were few and could be taken over easily by the State. He did not realize that he was living in a society honeycombed with monopoly. He did not foresee that the trusts were about to become the masters of America.

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

George's diagnosis and remedy are both far too simplist. But it was their simplicity which made them so captivating. The establishment of social justice seems to most people a formidable, almost an impossible task. George made it a mere matter of taxational reform. The social machine need not be taken to pieces and put together again. All that was necessary was a little tinkering, like the pulling over of a lever or the adjustment of a carburettor. By a simple fiscal device, all the benefits of socialism could be obtained—without bloodshed, without civil tumult, without the risks that attend the uprooting of superannuated social systems.

"Destroy this monopoly (in land)," said George, "and competition could only exist to accomplish the end which co-operation aims at—to give to each what he fairly earns. Destroy this monopoly and industry must become a co-operation of equals." ¹

Is it any wonder that such a doctrine made converts? Is it any wonder that its author regarded himself as a social prophet?

"On the night on which I finished the final chapter of *Progress and Poverty*," wrote George towards the end of his life, "I felt that the talent entrusted to me had been accounted for—felt more fully satisfied, more deeply grateful than if all the kingdoms of the earth had been laid at my feet." ²

This was the tragedy of George's life. He pursued a chimera. He thought he saw from afar the shining steeples of a fair city. He never realized that he was gazing on the unsubstantial creations of his own brain.

¹ *Progress and Poverty* (52nd Anniversary Edition), p. 227.

² Preface to the *Science of Political Economy*.

CHAPTER VIII

NEW YORK

THE mood of elation in which *Progress and Poverty* was finished quickly evaporated when George began to hunt for a publisher. The first he tried was Appleton of New York. The manuscript came back with a polite rejection-slip.

"We have read your manuscript on political economy. It has the merit of being written with great clearness and force, but is very aggressive. There is very little to encourage the publication of any such work at this time, and we feel we must decline it."

Harper and Scribner were next applied to, but neither would touch the book. George wrote to the few friends he had in New York, and they personally interviewed publisher after publisher, but without success. At this time there was very little demand in America for works on political economy, except as university or college textbooks, and obviously *Progress and Poverty* was not a textbook. George began to think his book would never see the light. In despair he resolved to publish it at his own expense. He had no money, but he had a printer friend, William Hinton, formerly his partner on the *Evening Post*. Hinton consented to set up the book and to take payment when George was ready. On 17th May the work was begun, and George's diary for that day contains the entry: "Commenced to set type on book. Set first three stories myself."

While the book was passing through the press George gave the manuscript a thorough revision, rearranged the order of the chapters, and inserted some additional matter. By the autumn of 1879 the work was finished, and the

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

first edition of *Progress and Poverty* appeared. Five hundred copies were printed off. George sent one of them to his aged father in Philadelphia, and wrote confidently :

"It is with a deep feeling of gratitude to Our Father in Heaven that I send you a printed copy of this book. . . . It represents a great deal of work and a good deal of sacrifice, but now it is done. It will not be recognized at first—maybe not for some time—but it will ultimately be considered a great book, will be published in both hemispheres, and be translated in different languages. This I know, though neither of us may ever see it here."

The part of this prophesy which predicted the early neglect of the book seemed likely to be amply realized. The reviews in the Californian papers were cool and inappreciative, and the sales were moderate. George's journalistic rivals thought it "a damned piece of audacity that Harry George should write a book at all," and they agreed with the reviewer of the *Alta California* who declared that it would be "dropped out of view in a short time as a blunder of a mind more active than wise." George relates how General Beale, a large ranch-owner, expressed to him the intellectual pleasure with which he had read *Progress and Poverty*.

"This he said, he had felt at liberty to enjoy, for to speak with the freedom of philosophic frankness, he was certain my work would never be heard of by those whom I wished it to affect."

On the other hand, courteous notes came from some of the notabilities to whom George sent presentation copies. Gladstone acknowledged receipt of the book on one of his postcards. Sir George Grey, the great British proconsul and land reformer, wrote from New Zealand :

"I have already read a large part of the book. . . . It has cheered me much to find that there is so able a man working in California upon subjects on which I believe the whole future of mankind now mainly hangs."

One thing the author's edition did achieve. It secured for the book a New York publisher. Appleton wrote that

NEW YORK

they would bring out an edition if the plates prepared by Hinton were placed at their disposal. George gladly consented, and after a little delay the New York edition appeared, with a dedication "to those who, seeing the vice and misery that spring from the unequal distribution of wealth and privilege, feel the possibility of a higher social state and would strive for its attainment." Now that the book was circulating in the East, George's hopes began to rise, but his optimism was dashed when Appleton reported that the sales were mediocre, and that they had failed to persuade any English publisher to buy the English rights. This was most disheartening, but George's faith in his work remained unshaken.

"It is the most important contribution to the science of political economy yet made," he wrote to a friend. "On their own ground and with their own weapons, I have utterly broken down the whole structure of the current political economy. . . . The professors will first ignore, then pooh-pooh, and then try to hold the shattered fragments of their theories together; but this book opens the discussion along lines on which they cannot make a successful defence."

Illness and poverty combined to darken his existence at this time. He suffered from biliousness and bladder trouble, brought on by anxiety and overwork. Financially, he was in very low water. The sale of the author's edition had not met the expenses of printing. George was in debt to Hinton and others. The New York edition was earning very little in the way of royalties. And for the last two years the gas inspectorship had brought in practically nothing. Now, even this slender source of income was cut off. In January 1880 a Republican governor took office and dismissed George from his post. An attempt to start a small weekly paper ended in failure, and George came to the despairing conclusion that he had exhausted all the means of earning a livelihood in California. In the circumstances he began to look East, as formerly he had looked West. On his former visit to New York he had made a few journalistic friendships, and had maintained relations in particular with John Russell Young of the *Tribune* and Charles

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

Nordhoff of the *Herald*. To these he now wrote for help and advice. Both replied encouragingly, promising to do what they could to get him a position on a New York newspaper, and Young considerably offered to lend him his fare to New York. After some hesitation George took the plunge. In the summer of 1880 he burnt his boats and set out for the East. He could not take his family with him ; he had no money to pay their fare ; and he had to do the long railway journey in the uncomfortable third-class cars of the Continental express. But the change of scene and the prospect of a new career restored the buoyancy of his spirits, and when the train stopped to coal at Winnemucca he sent back a cheerful letter to a friend :

“ I am enjoying the trip and am full of hope. The spell is broken and I have taken a new start.”

The New York which George entered on an August day of 1880 was a city of over a million inhabitants, with no statue of Liberty and no skyscrapers. The elevated railway was only a few years old, and the suspension bridge to Brooklyn was still in course of construction. Years of municipal corruption had deprived the second richest city in the world of many of the ordinary conveniences of life. The public services were neglected. Over the ill-paved streets the carriages rocked like ships on a stormy sea, and along the side-walks domestic ash-barrels scattered filth and odours till late in the day. The contrast of luxury and squalor was typical of the Empire City. Wealth and poverty rubbed shoulders daily in its streets. From the palatial marble residences of the upper town it was only a short walk to the teeming tenements of the East Side, where stalwart Irish policemen, armed with cruel batons, kept order among a swarming population of aliens. Farther south, in the business quarter, the pedestrian walked beneath meshes of wires over networks of tram-lines, and his ears were assailed by a hideous medley of noises—the rumble of wheels, the jangling of tram bells, the piercing shrieks of ferry-boat whistles. Already, twenty years before O. Henry gave it the name, New York was Noisyville on the Hudson. The thunder of its traffic never died.

NEW YORK

The swirl of restless humanity through its streets knew no pause. Day and night the arteries of "million-footed" Manhattan throbbed to the feverish beat of its tumultuous life.

To O. Henry, New York was Baghdad on the Subway, but to George, engaged in a deadly wrestle with poverty, it had none of the glamour of the capital of the caliphs. He encountered no romantic adventures in its streets. No mysterious stranger thrust gold into his hand. On the contrary, he found the problem of earning a livelihood as difficult as in California. The main object of his journey East was not realized. Despite the recommendations of his journalist friends, he failed to obtain a regular position on a New York paper, and he was reduced to writing pot-boiling articles for magazines and acting as the jackal of a local Democratic politician, Abram Hewitt. Hewitt employed him to prepare a Congressional report on labour conditions, but George was dissatisfied with the remuneration he received and terminated the engagement abruptly. Though he needed the money badly he would not work for less than he considered himself worth. He was indeed what the French call a "perpendicular" personality. The same rigidity of temperament embroiled him with the local Democratic caucus, and ruined any prospects he might have had as a politician. When he arrived in New York the Garfield-Hancock presidential contest was in full swing. The local Democrats, hearing of his success as a party orator in California, invited him to stump the State on behalf of Hancock. George agreed, but claimed more liberty of speech than the party managers could allow. The tariff issue had been raised, and the Democratic leaders had decided to hedge. George, however, was an uncompromising free trader and refused to conceal his opinions. At his first meeting he treated his audience to sarcastic comments on the party strategy.

"I told them," he related afterwards, "that I had heard of a high-tariff Democrat, though I could not conceive how there could be such a thing, and I knew there were men who called themselves revenue-tariff Democrats; but there was also another kind of Democrat, and that was a no-tariff

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

Democrat, and that what was wanted was to sweep away the custom houses and custom house officers and have free trade. Well, the audience applauded, but you ought to have seen the men on the platform there ; and I went off without a man to shake my hand. I got that night as I was going to my next engagement a telegraphic dispatch asking me to go by mid-night train to New York. The chairman of the committee met me and begged me not to make any more speeches."

George did not obey this injunction. His engagement with the party caucus was at once terminated, but over in Brooklyn he found a group of independent Democrats who were in revolt against the party machine. On their platform he made several stirring free trade speeches. Andrew M'Lean, then on the staff of the *Brooklyn Eagle*, the organ of the recalcitrant Democrats, was at one of these meetings. He had already studied *Progress and Poverty* and become a convert to its doctrines, but had never actually seen the author in the flesh.

"One night," he relates, "I dropped into Jefferson Hall while a mass meeting was being held without knowing precisely who were to speak. I was tired out with newspaper and election work and was glad to find a seat out of the way, and must admit that I drowsed during the remarks of some of our more or less familiar Brooklyn men. Presently a new voice commenced, and the abrupt, direct, clear-cut sentences, together with the radical meaning they bore, startled me. I stood up and looked at the new speaker. He was a short, sturdy man, with scant hair and full reddish beard. I had never before seen him. But I could not mistake his style of speech. I said to myself 'Thou art the man. There most certainly is the author of that book *Progress and Poverty*.' I did no more drowsing, and after the speech was over, I went and introduced myself to Mr. George."

Hancock's straddle on the tariff question did not save him from defeat, but it disgusted and scandalized George. He lost interest in party politics, and severed his connection with the Democratic machine. "Yes," he wrote a year later, "look at the Republican party, and also look at the Democratic party ! It is pot and kettle. I am done." (May 25, 1881.)

NEW YORK

Behind all this mental activity was a background of grinding poverty. Hack journalism brought in little, and more than once George thought seriously of returning to the compositor's case. In San Francisco his wife was driven to take in boarders, and eventually she had to sell up her furniture and go into rooms. The news caused George a cruel pang.

"My pleasant little home, that I was so comfortable in, is gone, and I am afloat at forty-two, poorer than at twenty-one. I do not complain, but there is some bitterness in it."

He was driven once more to appeal to the generosity of his friends. Returning a loan of \$20 to Dr. Taylor, he wrote (May 12, 1881):

"You do not know and I cannot readily tell you how much this little accommodation has been to me. It is not so much the want of money as the mental effect it produces—the morbid condition. The man who does not understand that, does not know how it is possible for people to commit suicide."

It was hard during this miserable time to hear of the success of contemporaries in California who had acquired the riches which always seemed to elude George. Strolling one evening down Broadway he ran up against "a good fellow whom I knew years ago in California when he could not jingle more than one dollar on another. It is different now, and he takes a wad of bills from his pocket to pay for the thirty-five cent cigars we light. . . . He tells me about some big things he has got into, and talks of millions as though they were marbles."¹ With this favoured child of fortune George contrasted the men crouching on the benches of the public squares, "from whose sullen deadened faces the fire of energy and the light of hope have gone—tramps and bummers, broken, rotted human driftwood, the pariahs of society."² And more than ever he became convinced of the glaring injustice of the existing system.

The one drop of comfort during this dreary time was the growing popularity of *Progress and Poverty*. Appleton had

¹ George, *Social Problems*, p. 79.

² *Ibid.*, p. 80.

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

brought out a cheap paper edition priced at a dollar which had gone off well. In January 1881 George could write :

“ About the book. *At last*, it begins to look as though it had really taken hold. When I came East, I found that it had hardly got started here. And until the last two weeks in December it went very slow. But then a movement began, and on the last day of the year every copy of the previous editions and every copy of the thousand of the cheap edition were gone, and orders and inquiries came piling in from every quarter.”

Appleton's were now able to sell the English rights. In December 1881, Kegan, Paul, Trench and Co. brought out an English edition which was quickly sold out. A German translation was prepared by a German-American sympathizer, Gutschow, and published in parts at the end of 1880. And by an arrangement with the proprietors of the *New York Truth* and the *Chicago Express*, the whole of *Progress and Poverty* appeared serially in these newspapers and reached a wide circle of readers.

In the spring of 1881 George published his third book. It arose out of an article which he had proposed to write on Irish affairs. Ireland was at this time figuring prominently in the news. Parnell was practising obstruction in the British Parliament, and the Land League, founded by Davitt, was waging merciless war against landlords with the weapon of the boycott. George followed the course of the Irish agitation with keen interest. He had already met Davitt, once in San Francisco and again in New York. He could not but feel sympathy for this pathetic figure, the victim of agrarian and industrial tyranny ; the son of the Mayo peasant who had seen his cabin unroofed before his eyes ; the Lancashire mill-boy whose arm had been torn off by the cruel teeth of a spinning machine. Davitt, who all his life had socialistic leanings, was intensely interested in George's ideas and promised to do what he could to push the sale of *Progress and Poverty* in Britain. To George, Ireland seemed an admirable text on which to preach a sermon in favour of the single tax. The magazine article which he started to write gradually swelled into a sixty-

NEW YORK

page pamphlet, and in this form it was published in March 1881 under the title of *The Irish Land Question*. In later editions it was called simply *The Land Question*, and this is a more appropriate title, because George's contention in the book is that the Irish agrarian problem was not something peculiarly Irish. It was only one phase of the universal land problem of all countries. In point of fact, Irish land law was slightly more favourable to the tenant than the land laws of England or the United States. The misery of the Irish peasant was not the result of English tyranny. It was an inevitable consequence of private property in land. Hence the usual remedies suggested—fixity of tenure, peasant proprietorship, etc.—were perfectly futile. Nothing would be of the slightest use except the taxation of land up to its full rental value. George appealed to the Land Leaguers to transform their agitation from a narrow nationalist movement into an international crusade against landlordism. He entreated them not to inflame hatred against England but rather to try and convert Englishmen to their views. Let them advocate Home Rule, but not complete political independence, the separation of England and Ireland being as unthinkable as the separation of the Southern States of America from the North.

The little book attracted considerable attention. It sold well and received favourable reviews in the American papers. Three separate editions appeared in England. One effect of its popularity was to bring George into touch with the leaders of the Irish organizations in America. He was employed to lecture on behalf of the American Land League, and set off on a tour which took him over the border into Canada. Owing to his mercurial temperament, his success as a lecturer varied. Sometimes he could sweep an audience off its feet. At other times, when the fire of inspiration burned low, he was dull as the dullest. At Montreal his first lecture was a total failure. "Don't know whether to attribute it to bad physical condition," he wrote in his diary, "or that I cannot get up enthusiasm in going over the same ground twice. 'Tis certain that I should have written it beforehand. Will try to do better to-

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

morrow. Feel very bad, but must try to pluck victory from defeat." Next day he was in better vein. "Did it," he notes. "Best ever have done. Astonished and pleased them all."

On his return to New York he found an important proposal awaiting him. Patrick Ford, editor of the *Irish World*, the organ of the Irish extremists in America, an apostle of dynamite, but a believer in land nationalization, offered to send him to Europe as correspondent of the paper. He was to get his passage paid and \$60 a week. The offer was a tempting one, but there were reasons why George could not at first accept it. He was heavily in debt. He owed money both in New York and in California. During a flying visit to San Francisco he had lectured to a crowded audience at the Metropolitan Temple, but an importunate creditor had tried to garnishee the proceeds. George felt it would be dishonourable to run away from his liabilities. From this predicament he was rescued by a wealthy sympathizer, Francis Shaw, father-in-law of the poet Lowell. Shaw had already purchased a thousand copies of *Progress and Poverty* for distribution to public libraries. Now, learning of George's embarrassment, he advanced him a loan which enabled him to pay off the most pressing claims. This left him free to accept Ford's offer. He decided to take his wife and two girls with him. Richard, the younger son, was sent to school, while Henry, the elder, was placed in a newspaper office. There was some talk of sending Henry to Harvard, but his father could not overcome his prejudice against university education. "Going to college," he told the boy, "you will make life friendships, but you will come out filled with much that will have to be unlearned. Going to newspaper work, you will come in touch with the practical world, will be getting a profession and learning to make yourself useful." Andrew M'Lean found the lad a reporter's place on the *Brooklyn Eagle*. At the outset of his journalistic career his father gave him the following rules for good writing: "First, to make short sentences; second, to avoid adjectives; third, to use small words; and fourth—a general rule—not to attempt 'fine' writing; to say as simply and as briefly

NEW YORK

as possible all that should be said and then to stop." Excellent rules which George himself unfortunately found it hard to observe.

Before leaving for Europe he paid a farewell visit to his parents in Philadelphia, taking his two boys with him. In the train they overheard him say musingly to himself :

" When I had finished *Progress and Poverty* I was certain that I had written a great book and that the time would come when the truth in it would set the world afire. But I could not feel confident of seeing in my own lifetime more than perhaps a hundred persons who would grasp it and believe in it. Yet • now, only two years after its publication, it is being talked of all over the world and men are rising up everywhere to hail it."

In this optimistic mood he embarked on the steamship *Spain* and sailed for Liverpool.

CHAPTER IX

IRELAND

ON October 25, 1881, George disembarked at Queenstown and took the train immediately for Dublin. He travelled through a country seething with anarchy and rebellion. During the winter of 1881-82 the British Government and the Irish people were locked in a deadly grapple. Coercion was at its height. Forty thousand troops and fifteen thousand armed police acted as a British army of occupation. The government struck right and left at its opponents. It suspended the guarantees of civil liberty and filled the jails with "suspects" from every town, village, and hillside. The Irish retaliated with murder and outrage. They mutilated cattle; they ambushed policemen; they slaughtered landlords in cold blood. In the forefront of the battle was the Land League, liberally supplied with funds from America. American gold was a new factor in Irish politics. More than all the wailings of poets and orators about Dark Rosaleen, it stiffened resistance to British rule. It made political agitation profitable to the rank and file as well as to the leaders. In two years the League dispensed over £200,000. Never had such a shower of golden manna descended on the green fields of Ireland! The petty Irish bourgeoisie, avid of jobs, rushed to enrol themselves in the League. A League organizer earned £3 a week. A political prisoner got £1 a week, his family's keep, and a plentiful supply of luxuries in jail. In a poverty-stricken country these sums represented wealth. As long as the money lasted there were plenty of patriots ready to sacrifice themselves for Ireland. As a cynical Irish Nationalist put it, "It was the dollar and nothing but the dollar that made the mare go."¹

¹ O'Donnell, *History of the Irish Parliamentary Party*, vol. i., p. 370.

IRELAND

Two days before George left New York Parnell and his chief associates were lodged in comfortable confinement in Kilmainham Jail. The arrests were the signal for an intensification of the agrarian warfare. Captain Moonlight, as Parnell had prophesied, took command. The League at once issued a "no-rent" manifesto, which gave the government an excuse to dissolve it; but its work was carried on by the women's organization with the quaint Victorian title of the Ladies Land League. The "Ladies" were a mob of hysterical mænads who far excelled the men in ferocity and hatred. Unfortunately, they too had money to spend. They spent £70,000 in seven months. Crimes of violence multiplied, and a deeper cloud of horror descended on rural Ireland.

George at first was totally ignorant of the sinister influences behind the Irish land agitation. To him it was the first campaign in a universal war against the private ownership of land. The Irish were fighting for the gospel of *Progress and Poverty*. They would carry it to victory as, ages before, they had ensured the triumph of the Christian faith. From Ireland the light would spread to every corner of the globe. A few conversations with Irish politicians quickly deflated these airy notions. As the correspondent of an influential Irish-American paper, George had access to all the leaders of public opinion in Ireland, from Parnell in Kilmainham downwards. He interviewed most of them and found the experience very depressing. With Parnell he could establish no intimacy whatever. The haughty Anglo-Irish patrician felt an instinctive antipathy for the shabby little American journalist. He had not read *Progress and Poverty*. He was not a reader of books. Nor had he the slightest sympathy with far-reaching schemes of social reconstruction. He was a politician with his eye for ever on the next move in the party game. George's scheme involved an attack on private property, and any attack on private property would alienate the Church. Parnell could not run the risk of driving the priests out of the Irish movement. His own solution of the land problem was the establishment of a peasant proprietary, which appealed to his

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

conservative instincts. From this position he refused to budge.

With Parnell's parliamentary colleagues George made no progress either. He must have thought them an odd collection of men to hold the destinies of a nation in their hands—the uncouth Biggar, with his fondness for barmaids and his family of bastards; the venomous Healy, with his rasping tongue; the slick journalists, M'Carthy and O'Connor, on the threshold of successful London careers; the verbose Sexton, with the dreary drip of his rhetoric. The rest were professional politicians with an insatiable appetite for petty intrigue and a total lack of political conviction. Parnell had provided them with careers, and they were unlikely to quarrel with him over anything so unimportant as a question of principle. It needed a personal matter like the divorce to sting them into revolt. To George they were civil, but they showed not the slightest comprehension of his ideas. The only member of the group who had any sympathy with his point of view was Davitt, and Davitt was in prison. Since February 1881 he had been kept in close confinement in Portland Jail on a charge of infringing his convict's ticket-of-leave.

The only other prominent personage in Ireland whom George could claim as a supporter was Bishop Nulty of Meath. In a pastoral letter the Bishop had rather incautiously stated that "the land of every country is the common property of the people of that country." The press at once pounced on this unlucky sentence. Extremists claimed him as a land nationalizer. His co-religionists denounced him as a communist. Between them the Bishop had a most uncomfortable time. He would have liked his statement to die a natural death, but neither friends nor enemies would permit this. George was one of those who were forever quoting the words of Dr. Nulty. He visited him at Mullingar, and published an uncensored interview with him in the *Irish World*. The Bishop was already in hot water with Rome, and would have been glad if his friends would leave him alone for a little. But this was just what they would not do. George wrote complacently to Ford :

IRELAND

"I presume we have at last got Dr. Nulty into the trouble he has been so anxious to avoid. One of the reasons I went to Mullingar was to sound him about the publication of his platform. I believe I told you that I got the Ladies (Land League) to order a lot printed just as it appeared in the *Irish World*. Alfred Webb who was printing them suggested to me that perhaps the Doctor would not like it, and that he was doing such good work that we ought to be very careful not to embarrass him. So I did not ask his permission, for I did not want to commit him. I merely told him it was being done, and he made no objection.

Well, the thing is beginning to tell. It is going all over the country and some of the priests are distributing it, and it is getting pasted up, and the Tory papers and all the English papers are reprinting it as an outrageous *official* declaration of communism from a Catholic bishop; and from all I have heard of their temper, I shall be surprised if the English prelates don't try to raise a row at Rome about it.

But it is going to do an immense amount of good."

Good to whom? Certainly not to Dr. Nulty, who wrote an indignant letter to the *Freeman* protesting against this broadcasting of his opinions without his consent. His protest did not save him. He sank into deeper disgrace with the Vatican, and remained under a cloud till the affair of Parnell's divorce gave him a chance to rehabilitate himself. When the prelates declared war on the Irish leader Nulty joined them, though he had previously expressed a private opinion that Parnell need not resign, and in the disgraceful campaign that followed no one showed more rancorous animosity than the land-reforming Bishop of Meath.

In Dublin George was kept busy writing his weekly article for the *Irish World* and lending occasional help to the Nationalist movement. Once the plates of the proscribed *United Irishman* were brought to his lodgings and hidden under his bed till they could be smuggled across to London. Another time Mrs. George, totally unused to public functions, was hurriedly summoned to preside over a meeting of the Ladies Land League. It was rumoured that the government was about to make arrests, and the ladies with feminine logic argued that the presence of an

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

American lady in the chair would embarrass the detectives. The detectives arrived and pounced on a male messenger who was leaving with important documents; whereupon the ladies in great alarm stuffed incriminating books and papers under their voluminous petticoats and scurried out of the room.

George addressed a few meetings in Dublin. He was well received, and Nationalist M.P.'s on the platform treated him to the usual amount of blarney. Sexton called him an apostle of humanity. But he could not succeed in interesting his audiences in his ideas. All they wanted was denunciation of England and praise of themselves. To rouse their cheers he had to tell them that the British Government was the worst in the civilized world, and that the Irish, "taking everything together," were the most peaceable people he had ever met. A crowd at one of his meetings, excited by such sentiments, tried to take the horse from his cab and drag him in triumph through the streets. George was highly indignant. He vigorously denounced the proceeding as "undemocratic." This only showed how little he knew the Irish. The Irish were not democrats. They were a nation of serfs who had not enjoyed freedom long enough to work the servile taint out of their blood. What they needed and wanted was what the Anglo-Irish Parnell gave them—a dictatorship. George was talking a language they could not understand. In this, as in other matters, he was no realist.

From Dublin George paid occasional visits to London, and during the first half of 1882 he lived almost continuously in the metropolis. For a month he and his family were the guests of Miss Helen Taylor, the step-daughter of John Stuart Mill. Miss Taylor was a well-known woman in the London of her day. Possessed of great wealth, she amused herself by supporting all sorts of advanced causes. Her energy was boundless and her conceit colossal. She told an audience once that she would never marry because there was no man worthy of her. If she had been a poor woman her eccentricities would have smothered her in ridicule, but her wealth and her haw-haw manner enabled her to impose on many people who should have known better.

IRELAND

Belfort Bax relates that when she swept into council meetings of the Social Democratic Federation all the members, including the poet William Morris, used to rise to their feet. Of George she made a complete conquest. She told him she accepted his theory, with a reservation about compensation to landowners, and he immediately wrote her down as "one of the most intelligent women I ever met, if not the most intelligent."

From her house the Georges went to live with the Hyndmans. Hyndman was another member of the upper middle class with a restless temperament and a weakness for left-wing doctrines. He had recently founded the Social Democratic Federation, and the Londoners were treated to the novel spectacle of a fashionably dressed gentleman selling socialist papers in the Strand or haranguing the mob in Hyde Park. The Londoners were not impressed. They knew that fashionable gentlemen are not the stuff from which revolutionaries are made. "We may handle even extreme opinions with impunity," said George Eliot, "while our furniture, our dinner-giving and preference for armorial bearings in our own case link us indissolubly with the established order." This was exactly Hyndman's case. Beneath his socialist veneer he was a bourgeois to the core. His respect for the conventions was amusingly illustrated once, when he and George were walking home through the London streets. They passed a whelk barrow. George stopped. "I guess I'll take a few of these whelks," he said. Hyndman shuddered. "All right," he replied stiffly, "I'll have some sent in for you." "No," retorted George, "I want them here and now." Hyndman tried to explain that gentlemen did not eat whelks from a barrow, but George was obstinate. He consumed his whelks in the open street, and Hyndman stood agonizing beside him, in the silk hat and frock coat of bourgeois respectability. "I never see a whelk stall at a street corner to this day," he wrote in his memoirs, "but I feel inclined to belt off in another direction."¹

Hyndman naturally tried to convert George to his Marxian socialism, but failed completely.

¹ Hyndman, *Record of an Adventurous Life*, p. 202.

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

"I did not make sufficient allowance," he wrote, "for the seductiveness of error, or perhaps for the natural disinclination of a man who has written a world-stirring book to admit that he had only captivated his great audience by clever misapprehensions agreeably put. George was in his way as provoking as Kropotkin. He would be forced by sheer weight of argument to a certain point, and then the moment the pressure was withdrawn, back he would go to his old notions. . . . It was useless to be angry with him or to press him too hard, for then he only went off to some of his devoted single-tax worshippers, from whom he returned more single-taxey than ever."¹

Hyndman showed *Progress and Poverty* to Marx not long before his death. The old warrior skimmed it through. "The capitalists' last ditch," he pronounced tersely.

In May 1882 a sudden change took place in the Irish political situation. Parnell was released from Kilmainham, after giving some kind of promise, written or unwritten, to slow down the Irish agitation. This meant throwing overboard the extremist policies preached by the *Irish World*, and supported by the Ladies Land League. Incidentally, it extinguished George's last hope of converting the Irish land war into a campaign for the single tax. The terms of the Kilmainham "Treaty" were not known to the public, but the extremists had a shrewd suspicion of what was in store for them. On the night when bonfires were blazing all over Ireland in honour of Parnell's "victory," the Ladies Land League met, said George, "like mourners at a wake."

The true significance of the "treaty" and the full extent of Parnell's surrender were not realized at first owing to the terrible tragedy which followed the liberation of the Irish leader. On Saturday, 6th May, in the Phoenix Park, Dublin, the new Irish Secretary Lord Frederick Cavendish, and the Permanent Under-Secretary Burke, were hacked to death by the murderous knives of a gang of ruffians calling themselves the Invincibles. George was in London when this terrible affair happened. He had spent a portion of the Saturday with Davitt, who had just been released

¹ Hyndman, *Record of an Adventurous Life*, pp. 290-91.

IRELAND

from Portland. Early next morning he received news of the crime, and hurried at once to Davitt's hotel. Davitt was still in bed. George burst into his bedroom with an open telegram in his hand and "a scared look in his kindly blue eyes." "Get up, old man," he said. "One of the worst things that has ever happened to Ireland has occurred." Davitt read the telegram. "My God!" he exclaimed. "Have I got out of Portland for this? For the first time in my life I despair."

The Phoenix Park murders sent a thrill of horror round the world and compelled the government to tighten up its policy of coercion instead of relaxing it as had been intended. This was a breach of the Kilmainham Treaty, but nevertheless Parnell loyally observed his part of the agreement. He damped down the exuberance of his Nationalist followers. He cut off financial supplies from the Ladies Land League and forced it to dissolve. He organized a new National League with a moderate programme, in which Home Rule ranked first and agrarian reform only second. Davitt's policy of "the land for the people" was rejected and Parnell's own scheme for a peasant proprietary became the official Nationalist programme. The party accepted his decisions without a murmur. Davitt alone feebly protested. But he could not stand up to Parnell. The son of the Mayo peasant was no match for the Anglo-Irish aristocrat. He could not compete in popularity with him. He could not raise the Irish people against him. As he himself confessed mournfully, "The Irish would never accept me as leader because I belong to the ranks of the people." When the party organizers began to accuse him of splitting the movement he got rattled and threw up the sponge. He announced his surrender in a speech at New York, where he went in the summer of 1882. George was deeply disappointed. He wrote to Ford :

"I got the New York *Tribune's* report of Davitt's speech. . . . It is several shades more apologetic than I should like to see it. Think of a man having seriously to defend himself from the charges of being captured by Henry George and run by the *Irish World*! . . . But whatever temporary events may

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

be, we can afford to laugh at those who oppose us. They are simply drifting, while 'the stars in their courses are with us.'"

Ford, whose hatred of England amounted to a mania, was enraged at what he considered Parnell's treachery. He bitterly attacked him in the *Irish World*, accused him of using money collected for the land war to pay the election expenses of his henchmen, and poured scorn on his agrarian policy. "The heel," he wrote, "has been firmly put down on the principle of the land for the people. It must not even be discussed. The parliamentary party have it all their own way." He urged George to stump Ireland against Parnell. George realized that this would be a waste of time. For the moment Parnell's position was impregnable. All the trump cards were in his hands. He had the peasants, the Church, and the American Fenians on his side. Any attempt to dethrone him was bound to fail. An American like George could not hope to succeed where an Irishman like Davitt had failed.

In the late summer of 1882 George went for a sight-seeing tour in Western Ireland, where he had some lively experiences and twice saw the inside of what he called a "British bastille." As companion he had a young Eton master, Joynes, who later adopted socialist opinions, was dismissed from his post, and became one of the early supporters of Hyndman's Social Democratic Federation. At this time he was touring Ireland as special correspondent for the *Times*. Later, he wrote an account of his experiences in a little book called *The Adventures of a Tourist in Ireland*. The two travellers took the train to Ballinasloe and then drove in a jaunting car to the little town of Loughrea. Loughrea was in the heart of the Clanricarde country, the most disturbed district in Ireland and the scene of innumerable outrages. A few weeks before Lord Clanricarde's agent, an old man of seventy, and his steward, had been shot by assassins concealed behind a loopholed wall. The police therefore were on the alert. When George and his friend drove into the town armed constables surrounded their car and conducted it to the police barracks. There they were detained for several hours—their only refresh-

IRELAND

ment, as Joynes pathetically records, being a glass of milk—until the resident magistrate arrived and released them after a brief investigation. George duly lodged a protest, but he was more amused than annoyed by his experience.

“The whole thing,” he wrote, “struck me as infinitely ridiculous. There was after all a good deal of human nature in Artemus Ward’s declaration that he was willing to sacrifice all his wife’s relatives to save the Union. And in my satisfaction in seeing an Eton master lugged through the town as too suspicious a stranger to be left at large, I lost all sense of annoyance at my own arrest.”

Next day the tourists drove to Athenry. In its neighbourhood another revolting crime had recently been committed. A local landowner and his soldier escort were shot dead in their car before they could grasp their weapons. This time the police let the visitors view the sights of the town unmolested; but they watched them closely. Just before his departure George found he needed a new collar stud. He had to visit three shops in succession before he got what he wanted. Then he went to the station to take the train for Galway. On the platform several policemen closed in on him and marched him off to the police barracks; Joynes, though not under arrest, faithfully following. Again there was a weary wait until the resident magistrate arrived, the same who had examined George at Loughrea. The police inspector justified the arrest on the ground that George had visited the shops of three “suspects” in Athenry. This was the unlucky result of his hunt for a collar stud. The police also produced a copy of the *Irish Land Question* which they had found in the prisoner’s baggage and in which the inspector had marked several seditious passages. This gave George the opportunity to deliver a little lecture on the single tax, which he wound up by handing round copies of the incriminating pamphlet to every one in the room. The magistrate again released his prisoner, but too late to catch the last train for Galway, and George vigorously protested against the inconvenience which the police were causing him. During the rest of

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

patriot, and all the New York politicians who wished to conciliate the Irish vote turned out in force to greet him. Tammany was particularly well represented. A few years later, when George was attacking Tammany, the men who cheered him at Delmonico's turned round and denounced him as an enemy of society. George could retort, with a twinkle in his eye, "These gentlemen gave me a complimentary dinner once."

CHAPTER X

THE BRITISH LECTURE TOURS

BACK in New York, George had no choice but to resume his hack journalism and paid lecturing. He felt acutely the precariousness of his financial position.

"How blessed are those," he wrote to a friend, "for whom the pot boils of itself! I have now just 25 dollars in the world, about half a week's living with economy; no, not that. However, this is no new experience to me."

The family continued its restless, comfortless existence; forever on the move; now boarding in rooms, now living in a furnished house; always enveloped in a dreary atmosphere of genteel poverty. Yet straitened means introduced no bitterness into the domestic circle. On the morning of his wife's birthday George left a note for her to read when she awoke:

"To me the mature woman is handsomer and more lovable than the slip of a girl whom twenty-three years ago I met without knowing that my life was to be bound up with hers. We are not rich—so poor just now, in fact, that all I can give you on this anniversary is a little love letter; but there is no one we can afford to envy and in each other's love we have what no wealth could compensate for."

An unexpected legacy helped to relieve the financial pressure. Francis Shaw died and left George a thousand dollars. He resolved to take the opportunity to write another book. As his subject he chose the tariff problem, but when he had written about a hundred pages the manuscript mysteriously disappeared—into the ash-barrel, George suspected. He had not the courage to sit down at once and rewrite what

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

he had lost, so that it was several years before his book on the tariff appeared. However, he managed to get some of his journalistic work into book form. A series of articles which he wrote for *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* were reprinted in a volume with the title *Social Problems*. This is one of the most freshly written of George's books, and forms perhaps the easiest introduction to his general theory. But its chief significance is the extent to which it departs from the principles of *Progress and Poverty*. George now admits that all the surplus wealth of society does not go to the landowners. Part of the loot is intercepted by industrial capitalists, though their share is smaller. The single tax, therefore, is not the universal panacea which he had proclaimed it to be.

"Let me not be misunderstood," wrote George. "I do not say that in the recognition of the equal and unalienable right of each human being to the natural elements from which life must be supported and wants satisfied, lies the solution of all social problems. I fully recognize the fact that even after we do this, much will remain to do. We might recognize the equal right to land, and yet tyranny and spoliation be continued."¹

"Let me not be misunderstood." This is rather cool. To whom was the misunderstanding due if not to George himself? Had he not written in *Progress and Poverty*:

"What I, therefore, propose as the simple yet sovereign remedy, which will raise wages, increase the earnings of capital, extirpate pauperism, abolish poverty, give remunerative employment to whoever wishes it, afford free scope to human powers, lessen crime, elevate morals, and taste and intelligence, purify government and carry civilization to yet nobler heights, is—to appropriate rent by taxation."²

And yet now it appears that tyranny and spoliation will continue, after the equal right to land is recognized.

Clearly, George's thought had developed, perhaps unrealized by himself. Possibly the study of American industrialism which he had made while writing *Social Problems* had thrown a new light on the activities of in-

¹ *Social Problems*, p. 264.

² *Progress and Poverty*, p. 288.

THE BRITISH LECTURE TOURS

dustrial capitalists and convinced him that they were not the blameless persons he had represented them to be in *Progress and Poverty*. Perhaps the criticisms of Hyndman and other socialists had sunk deeper into his mind than he was aware of. Hyndman, in his autobiography, claims credit for having induced George to write *Social Problems*, a book which "showed that he was beginning to understand that in our complicated society, man cannot live by land alone."¹ Whatever the explanation, George had published a contradiction of the main contention of his earlier work, and left the contradiction unresolved. It would have been to his eternal honour if he had gone back and restated his theory in the light of the fresh idea that had come to him. But few middle-aged thinkers care to retrace their steps. George, perhaps, felt he had no choice but to go on. The charm of his scheme was its simplicity. If he introduced qualifications and reservations he would destroy its appeal. Like theologians in a similar dilemma, he preferred to practice a certain economy in his exposition of the truth. His position is understandable, but our admiration for his honesty as a thinker would certainly have been greater if he had acted differently.

Towards the end of 1883 George received an invitation to make a lecture tour in Great Britain. The invitation came from the English Land Union, an offshoot of the Land Nationalization Society, formed by supporters of the Georgean idea. A fund was to be raised to meet the lecturer's expenses. George decided to accept, and on the last day of the year he landed at Liverpool, accompanied by his elder son.

His arrival in England was well timed. The cheap edition of *Progress and Poverty* was selling like wildfire, and converts were rallying in thousands to the new doctrine. Most of them came from the radical wing of the Liberal party. Liberalism in the eighties was passing through a difficult time. The political reforms which liberals advocated had nearly all been accomplished, and yet the social condition of England left much to be desired. Poverty, slums, unemployment, and all the other black fruits of industrialism

¹ Hyndman, *Record of an Adventurous Life*, p. 291.

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

flourished ranker than ever. Economic liberalism had proved barren, and strident voices were demanding that it should make way for some new political faith. Socialism was born, and honest radicals felt uneasy with regard to it. It contradicted their belief in liberty and *laissez-faire* but yet it offered a solution of the social problem, whereas economic liberalism had none. To men in this dilemma, *Progress and Poverty* came as a godsend. It proposed a cure for poverty which involved the absolute minimum of state interference, and allowed radicals to retain their belief in the blessings of individualism. And it aimed a blow at the landed interest, with which radicals had been at war since the days of the Corn Laws. Everything fitted in perfectly. When George came to England he found thousands of sturdy radicals ready to acclaim him as a deliverer.

George's first lecture was delivered in St. James's Hall to a large audience representative of all social classes. Michael Davitt was on the platform, and Henry Labouchere, Radical M.P. and editor of *Truth*, occupied the chair. At this time George's oratorical powers were perhaps at their best. He spoke slowly and deliberately, sometimes pacing up and down the platform, sometimes leaning over the table with one hand in his pocket. His pauses were long, and often he appeared to have broken down, but always his sentences wound triumphantly to their close. His hearers were never bored. He did not treat them to too much political economy. His speeches were lively expositions of a few simple principles easily grasped. Flashes of humour enlivened his discourses, and appeals to sentiment gave his audience the opportunity to cheer. There were frequent references to "the Creator" and "the All-Father." Unfriendly critics said that George believed himself one of the Almighty's particular confidants. But the religious note in his addresses was not uncongenial to Victorian audiences. And then he proclaimed such golden visions! He told his St. James's Hall meeting that the single tax would bring in £300,000,000 a year, and would provide every widow with a pension, every girl with a dowry, and every boy with a start in life. When the great audience heard this they sprang to their feet and cheered

THE BRITISH LECTURE TOURS

deliriously. Men jumped on the seats and waved their hats.

Next morning the *Times* discharged a fusillade of criticism at the lecturer, and the *Standard* described him sarcastically as "a man with a mission; born to set right in a single generation the errors of six thousand years." But the interest of the public was aroused, and for the next three months George was the most talked-of man in the kingdom. To his wife he wrote :

"I can't begin to send you the papers in which I am discussed, attacked and commented, for I would have to send all the English, Scottish, and Irish press. I am getting advertised to my heart's content, and I shall have crowds wherever I go."

In wintry weather George set out on his provincial tour. He lectured at Plymouth, Cardiff, Birmingham, Liverpool, Bolton, and Newcastle. Criticism followed him wherever he went. John Bright, now in George's opinion "at the end of his tether," referred indignantly to the monstrous proposals "imported lately by an American inventor." Frederic Harrison, leader of the English Positivists, called him "the wild man from California," and accused him of talking the jargon of Californian bandits and mail-robbers. W. H. Mallock, brilliant author of *The New Republic*, wrote an incisive criticism of *Progress and Poverty* in the *Quarterly Review*, and the Liberty and Property Defence League circulated a pamphlet against it—the work of that tough old judge and unrepentant individualist Lord Bramwell. George had the sensation of being an Ishmaelite. Every man's hand was against him. At Birmingham he complained humorously :

"The Tory party of course abuse me; the Liberal party are afraid of me; the Church party say I am antagonistic to every form of religion, and even Mr. Bradlaugh is going to pulverize me. The Irish party have warned their leaders against attending any of my meetings, and the Socialists are down on me."

It was not only with his avowed opponents that George had to contend. He had trouble with his own friends. The

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

general body of his supporters included a right and a left wing, and it was difficult to satisfy both. On the one hand there were single taxers who were either already socialists or on the point of becoming socialists. They wanted George to support the nationalization of capital as well as of land. This he refused to do. Capital was the creation of labour, he argued. It hurt nobody, and the capitalist was a harmless person, provided he did not enjoy a monopoly. But George never squarely faced the question whether the possession of capital did not by itself confer a monopoly, though he had come very near admitting this in *Social Problems*.¹

With the conservative section of his supporters, the trouble was compensation. They wished him to buy out the landlords. This, logically, George could not agree to. If his theory was true, the landlords absorbed all the surplus wealth of society. To give them compensation would simply perpetuate the existing state of affairs. But, he was asked, why should a man with £100 lose it if he invested it in land and keep it if he invested it in shares? George replied that landowning was immoral, like slave-owning, and in America slavery was abolished without compensation. Britain, however, had paid £20,000,000 for the emancipation of her slaves, so his questioners were not satisfied. The weak point in George's reasoning was his justification of interest as opposed to rent. Logically, he should have condemned both, since both are forms of unearned income. His middle position exposed him to attacks from two fronts. Conservatives denounced him for going too far; socialists complained that he did not go far enough. To the unintelligent observer he seemed a man who blew hot and cold with the same mouth. This was unjust. Granted George's premises, his attitude to compensation was perfectly consistent. But it was an attitude which was capable of grave misrepresentation. It gave his enemies the excuse to call him a thief, and considerably weakened the force of the appeals he was constantly making to moral justice.

From Newcastle George crossed the border into Scotland.

¹ See pp. 58-62.

THE BRITISH LECTURE TOURS

Here he met with an even warmer welcome than in England. Scottish radicalism was of a more resolute temper than English, and its hostility to the landed interest was sharpened by memories of the Disruption, when Conservative landlords had refused sites for Free churches. Moreover, Scotland, unlike England, still had a land question. In England the agrarian revolution, which began in the eighteenth century, had run its course. The smallholder and the yeoman had gone down in the battle against enclosing landlords. But in Scotland the fight was not yet over. Groups of crofters in the Highlands, last remnants of a dispossessed race, were fighting a desperate rearguard action with the triumphant forces of landlordism. Revolt had blazed up in Skye, and Glasgow police and naval ratings had had to be imported to quell the disorder. A government commission was inquiring into the grievances of the crofters, and their case was receiving sympathetic consideration in the press. George found the Scottish public ready to listen with attention to any serious pronouncement on the land question.

He first paid a visit to the disturbed districts in Skye, but though he received a sympathetic hearing he could not sting the crofters into action. They were too cautious or too cowed to imitate the methods of the Irish Land League. George humorously taunted them with their inferiority to Irishmen in this respect. Abroad, he said, the Scots fought like lions; at home, they were as submissive as sheep, and he suggested placing a sheep alongside the lion rampant in the Scottish standard. In the towns he had a better reception. At Dundee, Inverness, Aberdeen, Glasgow, and Edinburgh he spoke to large and appreciative audiences. The industrial areas of Scotland were full of transplanted Gaels, the descendants of victims of the Clearances, who burned to revenge the wrongs of their forbears; and the Lowland Scot, though his quarrel was rather with capitalist employers than thieving landlords, nevertheless felt the charm of the simple gospel preached so persuasively by the eloquent American. At Glasgow a meeting was held to form a Scottish Land Restoration League. The tartan was strongly in evidence, and the

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

enthusiasm of the audience rose to boiling-point when two pipers marched round the hall, blowing soul-animating strains. Nearly two thousand persons enrolled in the new organization. Branches were established in all the important Scottish towns, and George recrossed the border with the comfortable conviction that he had set the heather blazing furiously.

In England he lectured at Leeds, Oxford, Cambridge, and Hull. The Oxford meeting was the most sensational of the series. George was the guest of Max Müller the distinguished orientalist, and his chairman was York Powell the historian. Despite this powerful platform, support, the meeting, composed mainly of undergraduates, was bitterly hostile. George had difficulty in getting through his speech. He decided to cut it short and call for questions. Thereupon a high-pitched voice made itself heard from the body of the hall. It belonged to Alfred Marshall, then lecturer at Balliol.¹ George could not know that he had before him the future founder of the Cambridge School of Economics, nor did the questioner's manner suggest that he was different from the general run of truculent hecklers with whom George had commonly to deal. Marshall at this time was full of the intolerance of the specialist for the amateur. He told George bluntly that what was true in *Progress and Poverty* was not new, and that what was new was not true. George was not the man to take this sort of thing quietly, and he retaliated in kind. But the audience was on Marshall's side, and the flow of interruptions made it difficult for the speaker to reply effectively to his antagonist. Then, to make matters worse, Max Müller's son-in-law, F. C. Conybeare, later well known as an Armenian scholar, jumped to his feet and denounced George's doctrines as "scandalously immoral." George, whose patience was wearing thin, replied with heat, and was afterwards considerably embarrassed to learn that the man whom he had trounced was a relative

¹ Marshall had given three public lectures on *Progress and Poverty* while he was at Bristol in 1881. A lady who was present said that he reminded her of a boa constrictor: "he first slobbered over his victim and then swallowed him."—Fay, *The Corn Laws and Social England*, p. 152.

THE BRITISH LECTURE TOURS

of his host. The meeting broke up in confusion, and George left Oxford more than ever convinced that the venerable city was the home of lost causes.¹

At London, George addressed four more meetings, and then crossed to Dublin at Davitt's invitation. His meeting there was a complete failure. The official Nationalists boycotted it, and the audience was small and apathetic. Parnell had never forgiven George for his criticism of the Nationalist land policy. So long as he remained leader of the Irish party single-tax propaganda in Ireland was a sheer waste of time. George was disappointed to find how quickly the popularity he had enjoyed in 1882 had evaporated. But his eyes were at last opened to the real character of the Irish people, and he realized how mistaken he had been in believing that they would ever form the vanguard of the single-tax army. On April 13, 1884, he sailed from Queenstown for New York.

In November he was back in Scotland, at the invitation of the Land Restoration League. His popularity with the Scots had been greatly enhanced by his spirited reply to a criticism of *Progress and Poverty* by the great whig Duke of Argyll, who, incidentally, was the first to name George "the prophet of San Francisco." The League published criticism and defence together, in a pamphlet with the suggestive title of *The Peer and the Prophet*. It had a wide circulation, and proved most effective propaganda. George's second Scottish tour was an unqualified success. The Presbyterian Scots strongly relished the religious flavour of his addresses and crowded to hear him as years before they had flocked to hear Moody and Sankey, American evangelists of a different kind. George made a triumphant progress through the Lowlands, and finished up with a series of meetings in Skye. He felt that at last his apostolic journeys were beginning to bear fruit. Why should not Scotland play the part in the world revolution which he had once assigned to Ireland?

¹ According to one who was present at the meeting, George was infuriated because Conybeare called the single tax a nostrum. "On my side of the Atlantic," he said, "nostrum is not a word that gentlemen use in speaking of each other's projects."—Stephen Gwynn, *Experiences of a Literary Man*, p. 44.

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

In January 1885 George was back in London. He was the chief speaker at a great open-air meeting of the unemployed, held one Saturday afternoon outside the Royal Exchange. Though John Burns and Jack Williams organized a counter-demonstration and drew away part of the crowd, it was estimated that two thousand persons were present. Keenly alive to the rhetorical possibilities of his surroundings, George pointed to the inscription over the Exchange. "Look up there," he cried. "'The earth is the Lord's.'" A voice interrupted, "The landlords." "Aye," continued George, "the landlords. They have established the landlords for the Lord above all; and the want and unemployment, the misery which exists from one end of the kingdom to the other, the misery which encircles society wherever civilization goes, is caused by the sin of the denial of justice."

Before he left for home George ventured on another visit to Ireland. This time he tried Belfast. Perhaps the Ulstermen might be more responsive to his message than the Milesian Irishmen of the south. The experiment was disastrous. The Dublin Nationalists had boycotted him. The Belfast Orangemen tried to wreck his meeting. The hall was packed with a hostile crowd, who threw the chairs about, stormed the platform, extinguished the lights, and fought the police. George had to admit that there was no corner of the Emerald Isle where he was sure of a welcome. His disillusionment with things Irish was complete. On January 25, 1885, he embarked at Queenstown for home.

CHAPTER XI

THE NEW YORK MAYORALTY CAMPAIGN

TILL the beginning of 1886 George's main preoccupation was the completion of his book on free trade, which he had begun and abandoned three years earlier. A large part of the writing was done during the summer of 1885 at a farmhouse on Long Island. George's interest in the life of the farm and his observation of the habits of the animals supplied him with the illustration with which the book commences.

"Near the window by which I write," he began, "a great bull is tethered by a ring in his nose. Grazing round and round he has wound his rope about the stake until now he stands a close prisoner, tantalized by rich grass he cannot reach, unable even to toss his head to rid him of the flies that cluster on his shoulders. . . . This bull, a very type of massive strength, who, because he has not wit enough to see how he might be free, suffers want in sight of plenty, and is helplessly preyed upon by weaker creatures, seems to me no unfit emblem of the working masses. . . . I shall go out and drive the bull in the way that will untwist his rope. But who shall drive men into freedom? Till they use the reason with which they have been gifted, nothing can avail. For them there is no special providence."¹

The original feature of George's treatment of the tariff question is his attempt to carry the argument beyond the point at which free traders generally leave it. They are content to prove that free trade increases a nation's wealth and must therefore improve the condition of the working classes. What, according to George, they fail to observe is that the beneficent influence of unrestricted trade is de-

¹ *Protection or Free Trade*, pp. 2-3.

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

stroyed by the existence of private property in land. The higher wages which the workers earn are stolen from them by the landowners in increased rents. This is why poverty prevails in free trade countries, and why free trade by itself provides no solution of the social problem. It requires as its complement the single tax.

"Free trade means free production. Now fully to free production it is necessary not only to remove all taxes on production but also to remove all other restrictions on production. True free trade, in short, requires that the active factor of production, labour, shall have free access to the passive factor of production, land. To secure this, all monopoly of land must be broken up, and the equal right of all to the use of the natural elements must be secured by the treatment of the land as the common property in usufruct of the whole people."¹

The book appeared in the spring of 1886 under the title *Protection or Free Trade*. Owing to an accidental circumstance it had almost as large a circulation as *Progress and Poverty* itself. In 1892 Tom Johnson, one of George's closest friends, was a member of Congress. He persuaded half a dozen of his colleagues to join with him in reciting long portions of *Protection or Free Trade* in their speeches, till the whole book appeared in the *Congressional Record*. Congressmen were entitled to reprint at small cost portions of the *Record* and send copies post free to their constituents and others. Johnson took advantage of this privilege to reprint a complete cheap edition of *Protection or Free Trade* from the pages of the *Record* and to broadcast copies at the government's expense all over the United States. Nearly a million copies reached the public in this way.

George was glad to get the book off his hands. He had found the work of composition fatiguing, and he even assured a friend that he would never write another book. It was a distinct relief to get back to the occupations which his restless spirit found more congenial—to lecturing, article-writing, and the general work of propaganda. All the summer he was kept busy pushing the sale of his book (he

¹ *Protection or Free Trade*, p. 309.

THE NEW YORK MAYORALTY CAMPAIGN

was acting as his own publisher), and then in the autumn came one of the great chances of his life. He was invited to stand for the mayoralty of New York. Such an opportunity for propaganda was too good to be lost. George accepted the nomination and flung himself joyously into the fight.

The invitation came from a group of trade unions in New York. The year 1886 was a period of feverish agitation in the American labour world. All over the United States something like a mass uprising of the working class was taking place. Hundreds of strikes broke out in the industrial areas, most of them engineered by the Knights of Labour, then at the height of their power. On the 6,000 miles of Jay Gould's railway system traffic was paralysed for two months. In Chicago 60,000 workmen laid down their tools. Police fired on strikers at the M'Cormick Harvester Works. New York tramwaymen attacked cars run by blacklegs. To complicate the situation an anarchist outrage at Chicago scared the middle classes out of their wits and stiffened the opposition of the employers to trade union demands. The ground heaved with revolution. America seemed on the brink of social war.

In New York the tempers of trade unionists had been frayed by the action of the police and the courts. The police mercilessly batoned strikers; the courts fined and imprisoned them on trivial pretexts. The workers felt they were not getting a square deal. Their enemies had control of the governmental machine and were using it unfairly against them. Out of this feeling of dissatisfaction arose a movement in favour of independent labour representation on the municipality. The Central Labour Union, a local federation of trade unions, decided to run a labour candidate for the mayoralty. There was no trade unionist or professional labour leader sufficiently outstanding to rally the working class voters, so the selection committee approached George. He had many of the qualifications of a good working class candidate. He had once been a working man himself; he had strong radical sympathies; and he had written a famous book. Moreover, he would attract some of the better class voters who hated graft.

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

A combination of middle and working class reformers might poll sufficient strength to carry the election. At a special conference of trade union delegates it was decided by a large majority to offer the nomination to George.

When the invitation came, George did a very sensible thing. He asked the trade union leaders to guarantee him a minimum vote of 30,000. He was willing to run, but he did not wish his candidature to be a fiasco. The condition, at first, seemed impossible of fulfilment, but a thorough canvass of the working class quarters procured 34,000 signed pledges to vote for George. These were produced and verified at a great meeting in Cooper Union, and George finally consented to stand.

"I am your candidate for mayor of New York," he told his audience. "It is something that a little while ago I never dreamt of. Years ago I came to this city from the West, unknown, knowing nobody, and I saw and recognized for the first time the shocking contrast between monstrous wealth and debasing want. And here I made a vow from which I have never faltered, to seek out and remedy if I could, the cause that condemned little children to lead such lives as you know them to lead in the squalid districts. It is because of that that I stand before you to-night, presenting myself for the chief office of your city."

In putting his cause to the test of a political battle George was under no illusion as to the forces he would have to fight. He had plumbed the rotten depths of American politics. He knew the sordid reality that lay concealed behind the imposing façade of American democracy. The constitution handed down by the founders of the Republic had become the convenient instrument of a vulgar plutocracy. The sovereignty of the people had passed into the hands of political bosses, sprung from the dregs of the populace. Nowhere did the American demos show to less advantage than in the towns.

"In all the great American cities," George had written in *Progress and Poverty*, "there is to-day as clearly defined a ruling class as in the most aristocratic countries in the world. Its members carry wards in their pockets, make up the slates for nominating conventions, distribute offices as they bargain

THE NEW YORK MAYORALTY CAMPAIGN

together, and—though they toil not neither do they spin—wear the best of raiment and spend money lavishly. . . . Who are these men ? The wise, the good, the learned—men who have earned the confidence of their fellow-citizens by the purity of their lives, the splendour of their talents, their probity in public trusts, their deep study of the problems of government ? No ; they are gamblers, saloon keepers, pugilists or worse.”¹

The electorate was worthy of its masters. In New York an illiterate proletariat, venal as the populace of old Rome, was the obedient servant of a ring of grafters who worked their will on the city finances. It was this mass of corruption that George proposed to vitalize by the passionate eloquence of his appeal. The attempt seemed hopeless. Professional politicians smiled at the man who sought to blast a way through mountainous error by the mere power of his tongue. George alone, with his invincible optimism, did not despair of success. Even if he were beaten, the election would give him a platform from which his words would reach millions. The political contests of New York were followed eagerly by the rest of the country, and sometimes attracted the attention of the European press. The indefatigable propagandist could not let slip this unique opportunity to publish his doctrine to the world.

For years New York had been misgoverned and pillaged by the political machine known as Tammany. Founded in the eighteenth century as a social club and named after a legendary Indian chief, the society—with its “sachems” and its “sagamores,” its “braves,” and its “wiskinskies”—became first the Democratic caucus of New York, and then an unsavoury nest of scoundrelly grafters. Under Boss Tweed the machine robbed the city of 200 million dollars. When in 1871 the Tweed ring was exposed and overthrown Tammany politicians had to walk warily, but incredible to relate they quickly recovered their hold over the city. By 1886 they were firmly entrenched in the municipality ; the city officers from the mayor downwards were their nominees ; and the large alien vote of New York was at their command. They looked forward without anxiety to the autumn elections.

¹ *Progress and Poverty*, p. 378.

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

In the summer of 1886 Boss Croker succeeded to the chieftainship of Tammany. Croker was the child of Irish immigrants, and was himself born in Ireland. He proved to have more than his countryman's usual share of political talent. Famous in his youth as a gangster and prize-fighter, he was enlisted by Boss Tweed in the Tammany bodyguard, and gravitated in due course to the highest position in the society. For fifteen years this kind-faced man, with his winning smile, ruled New York with the power of a king. He was perfectly frank as to his motives. "I am out for my pockets all the time," he told an inquiry committee. And when he retired in 1900 to his native Ireland he had an income which the British Inland Revenue Department assessed at £20,000 a year.

When rumours of George's candidature reached Croker's ears he realized the need for prompt action. The appearance of an independent candidate was often the signal for one of those periodic revolts of the New York electorate against its masters. The movement, if possible, must be stifled at the outset. Croker's first ingenious idea was to offer the Tammany nomination to George himself. When this was turned down an emissary was sent to offer the independent candidate a safe seat in Congress if he would withdraw. The indiscreet negotiator blurted out that while George could not possibly win, his running would "raise hell." To which George replied, "I do not want the responsibility of the office of mayor, but I do want to raise hell! I am decided and will run."

Since the enemy could not be bought off, Croker looked round for a respectable Democratic politician to carry the Tammany flag. It would not do to run one of the usual grafters. Faced with the alternative of an honest candidate, the electorate might bolt. Somebody must be found who would appeal to the better class citizens. Croker's choice fell on Abram Hewitt, the Democratic Congressman for whom George had done secretarial work when first he came to New York. Hewitt was a rich philanthropist whose name had never been tarnished by the breath of slander. From every point of view he was an ideal candidate. But why a man of his unquestioned integrity

THE NEW YORK MAYORALTY CAMPAIGN

should have consented to become the tool of Boss Croker is one of those mysteries of American politics which only natives can understand.

Croker's last move was to appeal to the Republicans to stand down and allow the anti-George vote to be concentrated on Hewitt. Here he failed. The Republican bosses thought they saw a chance of victory in a three-cornered fight, and they put up a young man of good family, a future President of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt had already made some progress in politics. He had served in the New York State Legislature, where his piercing voice, shouting "Mr. Speakah! Mr. Speakah!" had awakened the echoes of the chamber and compelled the attention of somnolent senators. But his impulsiveness had estranged his leaders, and he had withdrawn for two years to play the gentleman cowboy in the Dakota Bad Lands. Now he was eager to return to politics, and the mayoralty election offered a convenient card of re-entry. Roosevelt, in his free trade days, had met George at the New York Free Trade Club, but he had no understanding of his ideas. In his brusque way he dismissed him as "an utterly cheap reformer."¹

The armies were now drawn up for battle and the leaders proceeded to address their troops. George's programme, which his labour supporters swallowed without demur, was, as the press declared, a mere "epitome of his popular essay on *Progress and Poverty*." Hewitt took the line that he was called on to save society from dissolution, and his speeches contained blood-curdling references to the horrors of the French Revolution and the atrocities of the Commune. Roosevelt declared for clean government and a war on the spoilsmen. To his intense disgust, the Republican candidate soon discovered that he was out of the running. He had hoped to slip in between his two rivals. But as the campaign progressed it quickly became evident that the fight lay between George and Hewitt. The "timid good," as Roosevelt scornfully called them, plumped for the Tammany candidate. Even the Republican bosses in the end recommended their supporters to vote for Hewitt.

¹ H. E. Pringle, *Theodore Roosevelt*, p. 112.

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

Roosevelt polled much less than the usual Republican strength and had the humiliation of finishing third. To a man of his intense egoism this was a bitter blow. He seldom cared to refer to his discomfiture, and in his *Autobiography* the whole episode is dismissed in three lines.

The army which rallied round George's banner was a motley host of labourists, socialists, single taxers, and municipal reformers. Prominent among his supporters were Powderley, head of the Knights of Labour ; Gompers, founder of the rival Federation of Labour ; Daniel de Leon, stormy petrel of American socialism ; Tom Johnson, a wealthy Western industrialist, later distinguished as reform mayor of Cleveland ; August Lewis, a prosperous straw goods manufacturer ; Thomas Shearman, a corporation lawyer ; Louis Post, an active journalist. It was lucky for George that he had some wealthy friends, for, though contrary to American usage, collections were taken at his meetings to defray the cost of the campaign, and cartloads of coppers were transported daily to the party headquarters, yet there remained a substantial deficit, which was wiped out mainly by Johnson and Shearman. Louis Post ran a successful campaign paper, the *Leader*, the work on which was done gratuitously by newspapermen who sympathized with George, though the papers for which they did their paid work opposed his candidature.

Several clergymen threw themselves into the fray, and figures in priestly robes were seen expounding the virtues of the single tax from platforms and " cart tails." Most interesting of all George's clerical supporters was Father M'Glynn, priest of St. Stephen's, one of the largest Roman Catholic congregations in New York. M'Glynn's independent mind and social sympathies had already led to differences with his ecclesiastical superiors. Some years before he had delivered speeches in support of the Irish Land League which had produced protests from Rome and earned him a reprimand from his archbishop. Since then he had been a marked man, but this did not deter him from coming out boldly on the side of George. He offered to speak in his support at a meeting in Chickering Hall. When the advertisements of the meeting appeared, Arch-

THE NEW YORK MAYORALTY CAMPAIGN

bishop Corrigan of New York peremptorily forbade M'Glynn to speak. M'Glynn refused to obey this injunction, having already undertaken to speak, but he promised to address no more meetings during the campaign. He sent George to interview the Archbishop and persuade him that *Progress and Poverty* contained nothing contrary to the theology of the Church. George obtained no satisfaction, and the Archbishop made a use of his visit which was hardly fair. When a labour leader, a Roman Catholic, appealed to Dr. Corrigan not to allow the Church's influence to be used in favour of the old corrupt politicians, the Archbishop disingenuously replied, "The only politician who has ventured to approach me directly or indirectly in the campaign you refer to is Mr. Henry George."

M'Glynn persisted in delivering his speech, and Archbishop Corrigan at once suspended him from his functions for two weeks. The fact of the suspension, however, was not made public till after the election, and M'Glynn did not disclose it to his friends. He continued to attend George's meetings, but kept his promise not to speak. When the press announced that he had withdrawn his support from George he publicly contradicted the report, and on polling day he courageously drove round the town with the independent candidate in an open barouche. The further "disciplining" of M'Glynn, culminating in his excommunication, will be related in the next chapter.

The hostility of the Catholic Church was a serious handicap to George. It robbed him of a large part of the Irish vote. One of the many Irish politicians on Tammany got at Vicar-General Preston, Archbishop Corrigan's deputy, and procured from him a letter in which he denounced George's doctrines as "unsound, unsafe and contrary to the teachings of the Church." This letter, printed and distributed as a campaign document, was a not unimportant factor in the final result. On the other hand, George made unexpected inroads on Tammany's peculiar preserve—the alien population of New York. As always before an exciting election, the number of naturalizations went up enormously. This was one of Tammany's regular methods of

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

increasing its voting strength. But, in this instance, not all the new citizens were for Croker. A German applicant was asked by the naturalization officer, "Do you swear to support the constitution of the United States?" "No, no!" was the angry response, "I swear to support Mr. George as mayor."

During these strenuous weeks the labour candidate did not spare himself. He spoke early and late, often addressing a dozen meetings a day. His oratory was his party's chief asset. Not only the mob, but men of culture and refinement fell under its spell. A little before this Hamlin Garland heard George speak at Brooklyn and recorded his impressions in *A Son of the Middle Border*.¹

"His words were orderly and well chosen. They had precision and grace as well as power. He spoke as other men write, with style and arrangement. His address could have been printed word for word as it fell from his lips. This self-mastery, this graceful lucidity of utterance combined with a personal presence distinctive and dignified, reduced even his enemies to respectful silence. His altruism, his sincere pity and his hatred of injustice sent me away in the mood of a disciple."

An army of enthusiastic followers fought valiantly by the side of their leader. In halls and clubrooms, at street corners and on vacant lots, speakers shouted themselves hoarse in favour of Henry George. New York was submerged beneath a deluge of oratory. The speaking arrangements were in the hands of Gompers, who never failed to speak himself when no one else was available. Like many small men, this little Dutch Jew had a voice of surprising range and power, which made it inadvisable for any other speaker to mount a soapbox in his vicinity. George himself had to cut short one of his open-air addresses because Gompers was speaking three blocks away.

The closing incident of the campaign was a great working class parade on the Saturday before the poll. Through drenching rain thousands of men marched to Union Square, where George took the salute. There were no bands, but the processionists supplied their own marching music with

¹ Page 379.

THE NEW YORK MAYORALTY CAMPAIGN

the rhythmical chant of their party slogans. Broadway rang with the refrain "George! George! Hen-ry George!" The size of the demonstration startled the bourgeoisie and caused a last-minute stampede from the Republican to the Democratic camp, with important effects on the result.

November 2nd was polling day. It was now that the weaknesses of George's party organization told most heavily against him. The modern system of publicly controlled elections did not exist at this time in America. The parties had each to print and distribute their own ballot papers. This not only destroyed the secrecy of the ballot (the voting papers were printed in different colours) but it often ensured the defeat of a poor candidate who could not afford to print ballot papers in sufficient quantities. George's lack of funds hampered him here, and it also prevented him from having inspectors at every polling booth to see that the Tammany officials did not "stuff" the ballot boxes with faked voting papers or poll the same man over and over again. "How can George hope to win?" asked a cynical Tammany "heeler," "he hasn't enough inspectors." It was true. When the result was announced, George came second on the poll. The figures were :

Hewitt	90,552
George	68,110
Roosevelt	60,435

Many connected with the election believed and asserted that George had really won, but had been "counted out" by the usual Tammany methods. This is not impossible. It is certain that grave irregularities occurred. Hundreds of ballot boxes, for instance, suspected of containing a labour majority were pitched into the East River.

George, however, was well satisfied with the result. He had achieved a great personal triumph. He had polled an unexpectedly substantial vote, and he had beaten Roosevelt. To his disappointed followers he addressed words of hope and encouragement :

"Thank God, men of New York," he told them, "we in this fight have won a victory that makes the true republic of the

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

future certain. We have lit a fire that will never go out. We have begun a movement that defeated and defeated and defeated must still go on."

In his elation George looked forward to fresh triumphs and a further enlargement of his personal fame. He did not realize, what is so painfully clear to us now, that he had reached the pinnacle of his career. Since the publication of *Progress and Poverty* the curve of his reputation had been steadily mounting. Now it took a slight downward bend. The change was hardly perceptible at first, but the passage of the years made it plainly visible. His star had reached and passed its meridian. The 1886 mayoralty campaign marks the highest point of his public endeavour. Never again did he bulk so largely in the public eye. Never again did he taste so intoxicating a triumph. Never again did his cause seem so certain of ultimate victory.

CHAPTER XII

THE UNITED LABOUR PARTY

WHEN the mayoralty election was over a reporter interviewed George and asked him what he intended to do. "I shall buy a bottle of ink and a box of pens," he said simply, "and again go to writing." In the previous summer George had discussed with his friends the possibility of establishing an independent single tax paper. These plans, interrupted by the electoral contest, were now resumed and completed. On January 8, 1887, appeared the first number of a new weekly, the *Standard*, with George in the editorial chair.

"Confident in the strength of truth," he wrote in his opening leader, "I shall give no quarter to abuses and ask none of their champions. . . . I hope to make this paper the worthy exponent and advocate of a great party yet unnamed."

Within a few weeks the *Standard* reached the respectable circulation of 40,000. This initial success it owed to the public interest in the M'Glynn case, which the *Standard* featured prominently in its columns. M'Glynn's affairs were now rapidly approaching a crisis. Corrigan's disciplinary measures had failed to intimidate him, and he continued to reiterate in speeches and interviews his belief in the single tax. His criticism of a pastoral letter in which the Archbishop had made a veiled attack on land nationalization led to his suspension for a second time. Finally, in January 1887, Corrigan removed him from the pastorate of St. Stephen's and transmitted his case to Rome.

In the painful controversy that followed mistakes were made on both sides. M'Glynn proved unnecessarily stubborn. Corrigan showed himself unduly eager for a condemnation. Passion and private prejudice prevented a

calm consideration of the real point at issue. At Rome the case was unsympathetically handled by the Prefect of Propaganda, Cardinal Simeoni, "the embodiment of timid and suspicious conservatism," as an American bishop described him. Simeoni started with a prejudice against M'Glynn. It was he who, some years earlier, had forwarded the Vatican's protest against M'Glynn's speeches on the Irish question. On that occasion he had been disappointed that Archbishop M'Closkey (Corrigan's predecessor) had not forced M'Glynn publicly to recant. The present complaint seemed a heaven-sent opportunity to bring a rebellious priest to reason. Simeoni proceeded to act on this assumption. He sent M'Glynn an order—first, to come to Rome; second, to retract in writing the opinions he had expressed publicly on the land question. The second was a most unreasonable demand. It was the lawfulness of M'Glynn's doctrines that was in dispute. To ask him to condemn them in advance was asking him to plead guilty. M'Glynn protested strongly against this attempt to prejudice his case and refused to go to Rome.

Here he was certainly imprudent. The refusal to obey Simeoni's summons exposed him to a charge of contumacy. He should at all costs have gone to Rome and demanded that his case be investigated by the Church tribunals. He was not so friendless as he imagined. As it happened, there was a new cardinal at the Vatican in the spring of 1887 who was interested in his cause. This was Cardinal Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore, the leader of the liberal section of the American hierarchy. Gibbons disapproved of Corrigan's action. It was the kind of thing that might irritate American opinion and strengthen the view that the Roman Catholic Church was an alien institution, striving to undermine American liberty. All his life Gibbons had exerted himself to dissuade the Vatican and the American hierarchy from decisions that would excite the suspicion of the American public. During this visit to Rome he persuaded the Pope to withhold his condemnation from the Knights of Labour, and he was instrumental with Cardinal Manning in keeping *Progress and Poverty* off the Index. It is practically certain that he would have had sufficient

THE UNITED LABOUR PARTY

influence to procure M'Glynn's acquittal. The important thing was that the case should be thrashed out, and Gibbons wrote personally to M'Glynn urging him to appear at Rome. M'Glynn replied, through his canonical advocate Dr. Burtzell, that he would come on certain conditions. Gibbons communicated the contents of this letter, verbally, to the Pope, but for some reason or other it was not passed on officially to Propaganda. Simeoni, having received no reply from M'Glynn, sent him a peremptory order to appear at Rome within forty days, on pain of excommunication. M'Glynn, unaware that his letter had not reached Propaganda, ignored the summons. The deadlock was complete. On 4th July the final blow fell. M'Glynn was declared "cut off from the communion of the Church, from its sacraments and participation in its prayers, and should he persevere in his contumacy, deprived of the right after death of Christian burial."

No termination of the case could have been more unsatisfactory. The technical cause of M'Glynn's excommunication was his refusal to obey a summons to Rome. The real cause, his land theory, was never submitted to the issue of a trial, and no authoritative pronouncement was made on its conformity or nonconformity with Catholic doctrine. In this unsettled state the question was left to trouble the peace of the Church and disturb the consciences of honest Catholics who had given intellectual assent to the single tax theory.

As for M'Glynn, his resolution remained unbroken by his punishment. He sturdily maintained that his excommunication was unjust, and an unjust excommunication, he held, could not stand in canon law. Some priests sympathized with him and felt the weight of Corrigan's displeasure. Many Catholic laymen considered that he had been harshly treated. But the American press on the whole justified the Archbishop. In its hatred of the single tax it defended an action which in other circumstances it almost certainly have denounced as un-American. M'Glynn retained the loyalty of his old parishioners, and they contributed generously to his support, so that he was in no danger of want. For the next few years he devoted himself to

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

lecturing and writing. He found a congenial outlet for his social sympathies in the Anti-Poverty Society, of which he was the chief founder. The society was a Christian Socialist organization which met on Sunday evenings and waged war on social abuses in the name of religion. Special hymns were sung, and speakers indulged freely in biblical imagery and language. M'Glynn was president and George vice-president—the priest and the prophet, as their admirers liked to call them. This union of religious sentiment with social aspiration made a strong appeal to many minds, and the society enrolled a large membership. It provided a useful rallying ground for single taxers, and its weekly meetings helped to keep their doctrines prominently before the public.

Single taxers, however, had another organization from which they expected greater things. This was the United Labour Party. The heavy vote polled by George in the mayoralty election encouraged his supporters to keep alive the organization built up during the contest and to make it the nucleus of an independent single tax party. The history of the United States is not encouraging for third parties. Seldom have they been able to break down the monopoly of the older political organizations. Free Soilers, Greenbackers, and Populists have disappeared, leaving scarcely a ripple on the surface of American politics. Even Theodore Roosevelt had to confess his inability to hold together his Progressive group after its defeat in 1912. "There are no loaves and fishes," he said cynically. George was dubious of the wisdom of the new departure, but he had to admit that the experiment was worth a trial. After all, the Republicans themselves had started as a third party. They had squeezed out the Whigs in the eighteenth century. Why then should the single taxers not in turn squeeze out the Democrats? If their programme had half the virtues they ascribed to it, it must end by capturing the allegiance of the electorate.

The new party was launched at a great meeting held at Cooper Union shortly after the mayoralty election, and steps were immediately taken to organize branches throughout the State. The party's title was intended to attract

THE UNITED LABOUR PARTY

the working class vote. The local branches usually called themselves Land and Labour Clubs. By August 1887 the party organization was sufficiently advanced to permit the holding of a convention at Syracuse. Here the first signs of weakness and schism showed themselves. Like the block of citizens who had voted for George in 1886, the United Labour Party was a medley of discordant elements. It included among many other shades of social and political belief a small but vocal section of socialists, whose presence in the party was particularly obnoxious to George. He held that, as single taxers were so often unjustly called socialists, they must avoid giving the slightest ground for the accusation by associating with those who claimed the name as an honour. Socialists, moreover, were among George's most incisive critics. They made no secret of their poor opinion of the single tax, which in their eyes was of no value except as a first step towards more radical reforms. This attitude irritated George. Accustomed to be treated by his friends as an infallible prophet, he felt ill at ease in the company of such lukewarm adherents, and he decided that either he or they must go. The dispute came to a head at the Syracuse Convention. The most distinguished spokesman for the socialists was Laurence Grönlund, author of the widely read and influential book, *A Co-operative Commonwealth*. The anti-socialist case was stated by George and M'Glynn. After a prolonged and acrimonious debate George carried his point. The socialists were expelled.

Weakened by these dissensions, the United Labour Party entered on its first electoral battle. At the New York State elections of 1887 it ran candidates for several offices. The governorship was not vacant, but the Secretaryship of State had to be filled, and George was nominated for this important post. Candidates were also run for some minor positions. Johnson, Shearman, and Lewis subscribed liberally to the party funds, and a vigorous campaign was instituted throughout the State. George and M'Glynn were the party's star speakers, and their oratorical efforts were supplemented by a lavish distribution of literature. Over a million tracts on the single tax were broadcast among the electors. At the close of the campaign George expressed

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

his confidence in the result. "The vote to be received by our party," he told the press, "will astonish the politicians." It did, but not in the way George anticipated. For the Secretaryship of State the votes were :

Cook (Democrat)	480,355
Grant (Republican)	459,503
George (United Labour)	72,781
Huntington (Prohibitionist)	41,897

In the whole State George had polled only 4,000 more votes than he received in the 1886 mayoralty election. In New York itself nearly half his supporters had deserted him. The defeat of the new party was decisive and crushing. On the night of the election George and Louis Post watched the returns as they appeared on the bulletin board of the *New York Herald*. When they turned to go Post asked George, "Do you see the hand of the Lord in this?" George stoutly replied, "I don't see it, but I know it's there."

There was really little cause for surprise in what had happened. George, as usual, had been wildly optimistic. He had exaggerated the strength of his friends and underestimated the number and influence of his foes. Among the factors which explain his defeat, the enmity of the socialists counted for something, though not for much. Their voting strength was negligible. More formidable was the hostility of the Roman Catholic Church, which threw the whole weight of its influence against a party which counted an excommunicated priest among its leaders. Even Patrick Ford, who had remained loyal to George up to this point, now deserted him—a serious loss for a politician with so little press backing. But, of course, the real reason for the disaster was the numerical weakness of the single taxers. Events like the mayoralty election had given them a false idea of their strength. They forgot that citizens who might support George on a purely municipal issue would in a State election prefer to vote for their own party candidates. George's heavy poll in 1886 was a protest against Tammany, not a demonstration in favour of the single tax. The State elections of 1887 made this desolatingly clear.

THE UNITED LABOUR PARTY

George tried to put the best face on matters, but inwardly he was deeply chagrined by the smallness of his vote. It convinced him that he had acted foolishly when he accepted the leadership of a third party. He felt like a general without troops, and he resolved to extricate himself at the first opportunity from his ridiculous position. Unfortunately, the manner of his withdrawal gave it the appearance of a betrayal and did infinite harm to the single tax cause. The circumstances were these. In December 1887 Grover Cleveland, the Democratic President, was approaching the end of his first term of office. As a gesture for the next election he sent a message to Congress urging a revision of the tariff. George seized this as a pretext to recommend that the United Labour Party should put no presidential candidate in the field at the next election, but give its support to Cleveland. His arguments were that the party could not hope to win; that a revision of the tariff was a good thing in itself; and that a discussion of the free trade question might raise wider issues. In his last book he had tried to prove that free trade, logically carried out, led on to the single tax. To these counsels of expedience M'Glynn offered an unbending opposition. Single taxers, he maintained, must fight their own battles and not be drawn by red herrings in the wake of the older parties, between whom, as George himself had once said, there was nothing to choose. Supporting Cleveland would mean fighting beside Croker and his gangsters (the condottieri of Tammany always marched under the Democratic flag), and this was a humiliation to which M'Glynn was resolved never to submit. For weeks the controversy dragged on in the pages of the *Standard*, and the disputants became hot and bitter. Each misrepresented the motives of the other. George accused his opponents of wishing to create a party for their own personal advantage. They retorted that he had been bought by the Democratic caucus. A sad result of this exchange of personalities was the rupture of the friendship between George and M'Glynn. For years they never met or communicated with each other.

George had plenty of backing in the movement and

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

could easily have put up a good fight for control of the United Labour Party, but he had lost interest in it and persuaded his friends quietly to withdraw. The schism extended to the Anti-Poverty Society, and here also George left M'Glynn in possession. The whole movement was thrown into confusion. In the presidential election of 1888 single taxers fought on different sides. The United Labour Party put up a candidate who secured a handful of votes. George and his friends worked for Cleveland, and preached on Democratic platforms the undiluted doctrine of free trade, to the intense disgust of the party managers, who had given out as the marching song of their party parades :

Don't, don't, don't be afraid,
Tariff reform is not free trade.

It didn't much matter what it was, for " bold " Cleveland was beaten. He was re-elected in 1892, but by that time his enthusiasm for free trade had cooled, and the tariff revision for which his party was responsible was a meagre and disappointing reform. George had put his money on the wrong horse. He had wrecked his party and alienated his friends, and he had nothing to show for it. His reputation as a practical politician sank to zero. The man who in 1886 had startled party caucuses and fluttered the doves of Tammany was now regarded as a pasteboard Jacobin who had met his Thermidor. The professional politicians treated him with derision. The public reverted to its old idea of him as an amiable but impracticable idealist.

George, mortified and embittered by these reverses, was glad of any excuse to escape from the scene of his humiliation. At the end of the year he paid a short visit to England, and returned, in the following spring, for an extended lecture tour. The applause of crowds helped to restore his self-confidence. Though the curiosity of the British public about him was less keen than in 1884, he was still able to attract large and enthusiastic audiences. He spoke all over England and Scotland, and debated publicly with Hyndman and with Samuel Smith, M.P., a solemn but

THE UNITED LABOUR PARTY

well-meaning Scotsman who had made a fortune as a cotton-broker in Liverpool and was famous for his philanthropic activities. In Ireland George had his usual ill-luck. He addressed a meeting in Dublin, which, we are informed, went smoothly until "a gentleman in the reserved seats" made an offensive remark, whereupon the audience drew their sticks and engaged cheerfully in a traditional Irish free fight. With his reception in England and Scotland George professed himself well satisfied. His meetings were large and appreciative, and notabilities who would have boycotted him in 1884 now sat on his platform. But he could not help noticing that the movement had suffered notable defections since his last visit. Many single taxers had become socialists. Five-sixths of the Fabians, according to Bernard Shaw, owed their conversion to *Progress and Poverty*. It was surely a malignant fate that made the individualist George the agent of a socialist revival. Radicals, too, had become lukewarm in their support. Labouchere, for instance, declared himself ready to tax urban land values, but he refused to abolish all taxes in favour of a land tax, and he expressed his utter disbelief in the power of the single tax to regenerate society. His attitude was that of many members of the Liberal party. To George, such views were a travesty of his doctrine. It was galling indeed to see his great social scheme reduced to the paltry dimensions of a fiscal reform. Yet to this day many so-called Georgists hold the single tax creed in this limited and unsatisfactory form.

While in England George was flattered to receive an invitation to carry his message to Australia. At the beginning of 1890 he set off with his wife on this, the last of his great lecture tours. The travellers crossed the American continent to San Francisco, where George's old fellow-townsmen gave him a tumultuous welcome, sailed across the Pacific, and reached Melbourne at the beginning of March. For the next three months they travelled thousands of miles over the Australian continent, George lecturing almost every evening, and sometimes delivering two or three speeches a day. The Australians, unaccustomed to distinguished visitors from the Old or the New World,

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

welcomed him hospitably, crowded to his meetings, and treated him to a succession of dinners, banquets, and receptions which left him limp and helpless. Of course, he was taken to an Australian race-meeting. An enthusiastic single taxer who belonged to a racing club secured George's admission as an honorary member. "Has he any horses?" asked the secretary. "Two," said the single taxer. "*Progress and Poverty*, and they are running well in the United States."

The atmosphere of hero-worship which surrounded George in Australia was very pleasing, but the strain of continual travelling and lecturing was tremendous, and he was immensely relieved when the tour came to an end. He made the return voyage by way of the Red Sea and the Mediterranean, visited some of the show-spots of Europe, and delivered some lectures in England and Scotland. On 1st September he disembarked at New York. The memory of his triumphs beneath the Southern Cross helped to obliterate the painful recollection of his political failure, and he applied himself with renewed zest to his writing and lecturing. But a sudden calamity struck him down. In Australia he had overtaxed his strength, and exhausted nature took its revenge. At the end of the year he was prostrated by a slight apoplectic stroke which produced aphasia, that distressing condition in which the patient either loses the power of speech or attaches wrong words to his ideas. George's rich friends at once came to his rescue and sent him off for a prolonged holiday to Bermuda. There he slowly recuperated, taking daily exercise, learning to ride the bicycle, and refreshing his mind with Shakespeare and Schopenhauer. By April 1891 he was able to return to New York. His restoration to health was not complete. The damage to his system was irreparable, and he was never, physically, the same man again. But he recovered sufficiently to undertake the literary work to be described in the next chapter, and to engage in the political activities which brought his career to its tragic termination.

CHAPTER XIII

LEO XIII., SPENCER, AND THE ORTHODOX ECONOMISTS

FOR some time George had been meditating a work on political economy. It had deeply disappointed him that the professional economists had paid so little attention to *Progress and Poverty*. He had expected them to acknowledge the justice of its attack on the old economics and to set about recasting their science in the light of its criticisms. Instead, they had either ignored the book or misrepresented its arguments. In the article on "Political Economy" in the latest edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* George noted with bitterness that his name was not even mentioned.

"Writers of France, Spain, Germany, Italy and northern nations are referred to in the utmost profusion, but there is no reference whatever to the man or the book that was then exerting more influence upon thought and finding more purchasers than all the rest of them combined, an example which has been followed to this day in the elaborate four-volume *Dictionary of Political Economy*, edited by R. H. Inglis Palgrave."¹

George had a legitimate grievance. The economists had not done him justice. Few had condescended to examine his arguments, and fewer still had treated them fairly. Of his academic critics, three only had brought forward vital objections to his main economic thesis. Francis Walker, the American economist, made the point that improvements in production, though they might lead to an increased demand for land, would also lead to an increased

¹ *The Science of Political Economy*, p. 164. Palgrave's *Dictionary* now contains references to George, but they are meagre and unsatisfactory.

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

demand for labour, and in some cases the demand for labour would be more intense than the demand for land, so that wages would rise faster than rents.¹ Arnold Toynbee, the English economic historian, drove home this argument by an appeal to experience. Between 1850 and 1878 rents in England rose; but so did wages.² Cliffe Leslie, the Irish economist, pointed out that rent, wages, and interest had all had an upward trend since the eighteenth century.³ How then could George maintain that rent and wages always moved in opposite directions?

George, it must be confessed, seldom profited by criticism. He had the closed mind of the original thinker. In the preface to *Progress and Poverty* he said, "I have yet to see an objection not answered in advance in the book itself." This confident attitude he maintained till the end of his life. In his view, the truths which the economists had rejected were obvious truths. They had closed their eyes to the light because the torchbearer was an unlettered graduate of the printing office and the forecastle. Well, he would show them. The man without a university education would do what the professors ought to have done. He would rewrite their science for them. As soon as he was back from Bermuda he applied himself to this task. It was to be the crowning achievement of his life. For years he toiled at it, but ill health and other distractions delayed the progress of the work, and death carried him off before it was finished. In its incomplete state it was published posthumously, with the title of *The Science of Political Economy*.

While engaged on what he and his friends considered the major work of his life, George was twice called off to repel notable attacks on the single tax. These encounters resulted in two short works of controversy, *The Condition of Labour* (1891) and *A Perplexed Philosopher* (1892). The first was occasioned by Pope Leo XIII.'s famous encyclical

¹ Walker, *Land and Its Rent*, pp. 169-70.

² Toynbee, *The Industrial Revolution*, 4th ed., p. 301. * This edition contains two lectures on *Progress and Poverty*.

³ Cliffe Leslie, *Essays in Political and Moral Philosophy*, 2nd ed., p. 151. This edition contains an article on the American economists, with a reference to George.

LEO XIII., SPENCER, AND ORTHODOX ECONOMISTS

on social questions, *Rerum Novarum*. The Pope, while making an earnest and timely plea for the Christianizing of economic relations and expressing sympathy with movements for the betterment of the working classes, declared the Church's unswerving opposition to schemes of communism, socialism, and land nationalization which violated the right of private property. The single tax was not specifically mentioned, but it was generally regarded as sharing in the papal condemnation of land nationalization. This was the opinion of Archbishop Corrigan, and also of Cardinal Manning, a more impartial judge. An attack from so august a quarter must not, George decided, go unanswered. Putting aside his other work, he devoted the summer of 1891 to the composition of a long open letter to the Pope, which was published under the title of *The Condition of Labour*. A handsomely bound copy of the Italian translation was sent to Leo, but George never received, directly or indirectly, any acknowledgment.

In his controversy with the Pope, George had the advantage of starting from the same major premise as his adversary. Both believed in the famous, but now discredited, doctrine of natural rights.¹ Both held that private property was a right, antecedent to the state and independent of it, with which governments were not entitled to interfere. The point at issue between them was, what did the term *private property* cover? Did it include property in land?

Leo answered this question in the affirmative. In doing so he had to circumvent an awkward principle which he and George held in common, namely that "God has given the earth to the use and enjoyment of the universal human race." (*Rer. Nov.*, par. 9.) The Pope cleared this obstacle with the assistance of a sophistry.

"The earth, though divided among private owners, ceases not thereby to minister to the needs of all; for there is no one

¹ It is a pity that George thought it necessary to hitch his economic theory to this obsolescent political philosophy. It exposed him to damaging attacks like that of T. H. Huxley (in two *Nineteenth Century* articles reprinted in *Method and Results*). Huxley and other critics, however, failed to realize that exposing the inconsequences of George's social theory did not dispose of the economic argument for the single tax.

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

who does not live on what the land brings forth. Those who do not possess the soil contribute their labour ; so that it may truly be said that all human subsistence is derived either from labour on one's own land, or from some laborious industry which is paid for either in the produce of the land itself or in that which is exchanged for what the land brings forth." (*Rer. Nov.*, par. 9.)

What this implies was made plain by George in an imaginary case of conscience which he presented for Leo's consideration.

" I am one of several children to whom our father left a field abundant for our support. . . . I being the eldest took the whole field in exclusive ownership. But in doing so, I have not deprived my brothers of their support from it, for I have let them work for me on it, paying them from the produce as much wages as I would have had to pay to strangers. Is there any reason why my conscience should not be clear ? " ¹

The argument is unanswerable. As George put it, " between utterly depriving a man of God's gifts, and depriving him of God's gifts unless he will buy them, is merely the difference between the robber who leaves his victim to die and the robber who puts him to ransom. " ²

Amongst the Pope's more positive justifications of landed property was the contention that land was sometimes a form of wages. Suppose a worker invests his savings in a plot of land. The land is then his wages in another form. If it is nationalized, the worker is in effect robbed of his earnings. (*Rer. Nov.*, par. 6.)

George's reply to this was to point out that a similar argument would justify property in human beings. Suppose the workman invested his savings in a slave. Would not the emancipation of the slave in effect deprive him of his earnings ? Must we then withdraw our opposition to slavery ?

Leo's only other serious argument was the familiar one that labour applied to land creates a property in it. (*Rer. Nov.*, par. 14.) Labour, retorted George, cannot create a title to what it has not itself produced. The cultivator

¹ *The Condition of Labour*, p. 48.

² *Ibid.*, p. 50.

LEO XIII., SPENCER, AND ORTHODOX ECONOMISTS

has a claim to his crops, but not to the soil on which they are grown, for the earth is the creation and the gift of God, the universal storehouse to which all his children must have access. For convenience, private possession or occupation may be allowed, but the possessors must compensate those who are thereby excluded, just as the peasant who, to prevent excessive subdivision, takes over the whole of his father's holding must indemnify his brothers and sisters. This is just what the single tax would do. It would compel the owners of land to share their privileges with their disinherited brethren. It would establish that practical communism, not in the ownership of wealth but in its enjoyment, which was the social ideal of the early and mediæval Church. It would provide the State with a method of raising revenue which has all the marks of being divinely ordained.

George closed his letter with an earnest appeal to the Pope to restore the broken alliance between Christianity and social reform.

"Servant of the servants of God! I call you by the strongest and sweetest of your titles. In your hands more than in those of any living man lies the power to say the word and make the sign that shall end an unnatural divorce, and marry again to religion all that is pure and high in social aspiration."¹

There is no evidence that Leo ever read *The Condition of Labour*, but George always held it was responsible for an event that took place shortly after—the rehabilitation of Father M'Glynn. In 1892 Archbishop Satolli arrived in the United States with power as Papal Alegate to settle certain outstanding questions that were troubling the consciences of American Catholics. One of these was the M'Glynn case. Satolli invited M'Glynn to send in a written statement of his single tax creed, and this document was carefully sifted by four professors of the Catholic University of Washington. Their unanimous verdict was that it contained nothing contrary to Catholic faith or morals. On receiving this report, Satolli at once lifted the ban on the excommunicated priest and restored him to all his old

¹ *The Condition of Labour*, p. 160.

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

rights and privileges within the Church. A year later M'Glynn visited Rome and met the Pope. "Surely," said Leo, "you admit the right of property?" "Of course, I do," replied M'Glynn, "and we would make absolutely sacred the right of property *in the products of individual industry.*" Tactfully the Pope steered the conversation into another channel.

The reinstatement of M'Glynn was an unexpected rebuff to the Corrigan faction, who had hailed *Rerum Novarum* as an endorsement of their views. Corrigan himself behaved with absolute correctness, but some of his partisans accused the four professors who had passed M'Glynn's statement of ignoring or misinterpreting the pronouncements of the Holy Father. Certainly, after *Rerum Novarum*, M'Glynn's restoration came as a surprise. It had been so universally accepted that the Pope meant to condemn the single tax. But now the encyclical had to be interpreted as disapproving not the single tax but certain distortions and misrepresentations of it by which the Pope had been misled. Whatever the uncertainties caused by Satolli's action, one fact at least could not be disputed. M'Glynn had won his battle. He had established the right of Catholics to believe in the single tax. It was the greatest success achieved by the movement since the mayoralty election of 1886. George rejoiced at the triumph of his old friend, and eagerly seized the opportunity to resume the relations broken off four years before. As soon as Satolli's decision was announced he telegraphed his congratulations and M'Glynn cordially replied. The friendship, thus restored, remained unbroken till George's death.

A Perplexed Philosopher was the outcome of a dispute with another pontiff; this time, of science. In 1891 Herbert Spencer, pope of the agnostics, issued the volume *Justice*, in which he definitely and finally repudiated the views in favour of land nationalization, which he had expressed in *Social Statics* forty years before. So notable an apostasy was a direct blow to the single tax cause. George drew his quill and proceeded to castigate the renegade.

The present generation, to whom Herbert Spencer is a

LEO XIII., SPENCER, AND ORTHODOX ECONOMISTS

mere name, finds it difficult to understand the reverential awe with which the Victorian age regarded him. To his contemporaries he was the equal of Newton and Aristotle, the greatest philosopher of modern times. So outrageous an overestimate brought with it its appropriate Nemesis. Scarcely was Spencer in his grave before the huge, fantastic bubble of his reputation collapsed. To-day, the dusty tomes of the Synthetic Philosophy lie unread on library shelves, and the world goes its way, deaf to the windy preachings of the apostle of individualism. But in 1891 it was a different story. Spencer was at the height of his fame; he was universally acclaimed as Europe's greatest thinker; and George had some excuse for regarding his latest pronouncement as a kind of scientific encyclical, calling for detailed comment and criticism.

The history of Spencer's opinions on the land question is related with copious quotations in *A Perplexed Philosopher*. Like George, he was a believer in natural rights; the most fundamental right on which the others depended being the right to equal freedom.

"Every man has freedom to do all that he wills, provided he infringes not the equal freedom of every other man."

From this basic principle Spencer deduced in *Social Statics* (published in 1850) two other elementary human rights: the right to life and liberty, and the right to the use of the earth. This second right could only be enforced if the property of the soil were vested in the State. Some compensation would have to be paid to existing landowners, but Spencer did not enter into the details of this practical question. It was a problem for the future, one of the most intricate that society would be called on to solve.

Years rolled on, and *Social Statics* became out of print in England, though it still continued to circulate in the United States. Spencer himself moved over from the left to the right in politics. The aggressive individualism which made him a radical in his youth, turned him into a conservative in his old age. It became only a question of time when he would shed his inconvenient views on land nationalization.

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

The occasion was supplied indirectly by *Progress and Poverty*. In an article on this book in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1883 the writer linked together the names of George and Spencer as opponents of private property in land. This drew from Spencer a disclaimer in the *St. James's Gazette*, in which he indicated rather than stated outright that *Social Statics* no longer represented his opinions, and that he had withdrawn it from circulation in England. With a certain want of candour, however, he omitted to inform his readers that it was still selling in the United States. Six years later a newspaper controversy (in the *Times*) compelled him to redefine his position. To save his consistency he now elaborated a distinction between what he called absolute and relative political ethics. Land nationalization was justified by the first but not by the second. In other words, it was right in principle, but inexpedient in practice—the shuffling kind of argument on which Spencer had so often poured scorn in his hot youth. Finally, in *Justice*, he took a slightly different line. He still upheld mankind's universal right to the use of the earth, but he now considered that this was sufficiently recognized by the legislature's power to buy land for public purposes at a reasonable price. Of course, the legislature might, if it chose, buy up all the land, but this would not be a profitable transaction. The cost of compensation would be too high. Private property in land, then, must be permitted, but in England at least this involved no injustice, because the English landowners had ransomed their property. Since the Elizabethan Poor Law of 1601 they had paid £500 millions to the landless classes in poor rates, and this was more than the value of the land they held.

All these turnings and twistings of an embarrassed logician George faithfully chronicled. It would have been better if he had done no more. The facts spoke clearly for themselves. But George could not resist the temptation to embroider his thesis. For Spencer he had something like an antipathy. Personally, he never liked him, ever since he met him at a London "crush" in 1882 and quarrelled with him over the Irish Land Leaguers. Nor

LEO XIII., SPENCER, AND ORTHODOX ECONOMISTS

did it diminish his dislike to learn that Spencer had thrown *Progress and Poverty* aside after a few minutes reading "on finding how visionary were its ideas."¹ The desire to deal this contemptuous adversary a knockout blow betrayed George into an injustice. He made an unfounded attack on Spencer's personal character. On the title-page of *A Perplexed Philosopher* he printed Browning's lines on the Lost Leader :

" Just for a handful of silver he left us,
Just for a ribbon to stick in his coat,"

and he permitted himself to say :

" He (Spencer) had tasted the sweets of London society. . . . And while the fire in the hall of the High Priest was warm and pleasant, ' society ' had become suddenly aroused to rage against those who questioned private property in land. So when the *St. James's* and the *Edinburgh*, both of them chosen organs of Sir John and His Grace, accused Herbert Spencer of being one of these, it was to him like the voices of the accusing damsels to Peter. Fearing, too, that he might be thrust out in the cold, he, too, sought refuge in an alibi."²

To accuse an elderly valetudinarian of hungering after the sweets of London society was patently absurd. And it was equally ridiculous to suggest that Spencer cared anything for honours and decorations which throughout a long life he had consistently refused. George's baseless slander recoiled on himself. It excited sympathy for his victim and gave Spencer an excuse for ignoring an attack on his logical consistency which he might have found it hard to answer. Publicly, he took no notice of George's criticisms, but in private letters and in his *Autobiography* he complained bitterly of the insinuations against his intellectual integrity.³

Judged by sales, *A Perplexed Philosopher* was one of the least successful of George's books. The public attaches less importance to logical consistency than writers and thinkers

¹ Spencer's statement in his letter to the *St. James's Gazette*.

² *A Perplexed Philosopher*, p. 85.

³ *Autobiography*, vol. ii., pp. 459-60, and Duncan, *Life and Letters of Herbert Spencer*, pp. 338-43.

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

suppose. If anything, it is rather pleased to see a rationalist turn on his reason the moment it leads him to an awkward conclusion. The plain man always sympathizes with the victory of will over idea. George had utterly misjudged the world's reaction to Spencer's recantation. Readers found his minute dissection of his opponent's reasoning processes infinitely wearisome, and could not understand why so much fuss was made over a man's change of mind ; while, to the leaders of influential opinion, Spencer's desertion of his early principles was a return to sanity, a victory for saving common sense. George began to regret the months he had wasted on a barren controversy. They might have been spent to so much better purpose over his economic treatise. This, too, was the opinion of some of his friends. "Remember," wrote Dr. Taylor, "that life is short and the power of the human mind limited and that you have not yet produced (what you should produce) a monumental work on political economy." George appreciated the wisdom of this advice. For the years that remained to him he resolved to make *The Science of Political Economy* his chief literary labour.

George's last book is an unsatisfactory production. The writing of it proved harder than he had anticipated. Difficulties crowded upon him of which he had no premonition. The book was to serve a double purpose. It was to make a victorious assault on the orthodox economists, and it was to give an exposition of economic science which would make the case for the single tax crystal clear. Neither of these objects was accomplished satisfactorily. When George advanced against the army of the economists, he discovered to his dismay that it had stolen off to a new position where it was lying safely entrenched behind the barbed-wire entanglements of an obscure terminology, a mysterious apparatus of mathematical ideas, and an unreadable English style. To the classical school had succeeded the neo-classical. Economics had become an occult science. Marshall, not Mill, was the economic high priest of the English-speaking world. This unexpected development was a great embarrassment to George. It was like the change over from open warfare to trench fighting. He

LEO XIII., SPENCER, AND ORTHODOX ECONOMISTS

dared not make a frontal attack on the carefully prepared defences of his enemies, and he had not the technical knowledge to blast them out of their positions. What was he to do? Keep on dissecting the cold corpse of the old political economy? Or admit that the living exponents of the science were too much for him? It was a cruel dilemma. George tried to console himself by jeering at "the recent purveyors of economic nonsense in Anglo-German jargon" and "the incomprehensible works of Professor Alfred Marshall," but he knew that the laugh was against him. His foes had shifted beyond the range of his guns, and his shells were bursting harmlessly over positions that had been evacuated. *The Science of Political Economy* was the sort of book which reviewers damn with the terrible epithet of "out of date." In the index there are thirty references to Mill as against only four to Marshall.

The attempt to make economics speak the language of the single tax encountered difficulties of a different kind. George found he was asking more from a science than it could give. Science is neutral. It suggests practical policies; it makes no infallible pronouncement as to which is best. Men must find this out for themselves by reflection, discussion, and experiment; and room will always remain for differences of opinion. Thus doctors disagree in practice though they unite in accepting the principles of medical science. The same is true of social physicians. George tried to bridge this difficulty by resurrecting an eighteenth-century superstition—the conception of a natural order. The natural order in society corresponds to the physical order in nature. Science reveals it, and men have nothing to do but conform to it—which is easy, since it is a *natural* order. All that is necessary, then, for the attainment of an ideal state is the perfection of the social sciences. According to Socrates, knowledge was virtue. According to George, it was social progress and achievement.

How does George prove that the natural social order must be based on the single tax? Because it is an order founded on justice, and the great rule of economic justice is that the producer gets what he produces. This rules out private property in land, since land is not produced, and its

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

ownership allows non-producers to live off the labour of others. On the other hand, justice sanctions private property in everything produced by labour, and this covers most things except land. Consequently the one great reform needed to bring the existing order into conformity with nature and justice is to abolish landed property by means of the single tax.

The argument sounds rather thin and unconvincing, and it was hardly necessary to write a whole book on political economy to prove it. *Progress and Poverty* presented a much more plausible case for the single tax. George had not improved on his earlier work. In the form in which he left it, *The Science of Political Economy* must be pronounced meagre, fragmentary, and disappointing. It does not live up to its title. Important departments of economics are left unexplored; contemporary developments of economic thought are neglected; ancient heresies like the labour theory of value are revived; the reader is served up with a queer blend of eighteenth-century philosophy and nineteenth-century radicalism. George was not fully conscious of all these faults, but he could not help feeling that something had gone wrong with his monumental work on political economy. Instead of a crowning achievement, it looked like becoming the most pitiful of anticlimaxes. Yet he had no choice but to toil on. His friends were impatiently waiting for the book that was to put the coping-stone on the single tax edifice, and he could not share with them his dread that he was ploughing the sands. Death came at last to end a tragic situation. George received a second invitation to stand for the New York mayoralty. With relief he flung aside his unfinished manuscript and plunged desperately into the battle that cost him his life.

CHAPTER XIV

THE LAST BATTLE

DURING the years when he was at work on *The Science of Political Economy* George was supported mainly by the bounty of Tom Johnson and August Lewis. The *Standard*, after languishing for years, finally expired in 1892, and George would have been thrown back on casual journalism but for the intervention of his two generous friends. As he said in the dedication to them of his unfinished work, they, "of their own motion and without suggestion or thought of mine," begged the privilege of relieving him from pecuniary care, that he might have leisure and peace of mind to finish his book. In the last year of his life this financial assistance became less necessary. An English admirer, Silas Burroughs, member of a famous firm of druggists, left him a substantial legacy which made him practically independent of outside help.

For many years George had occupied one of New York's old brown stone houses in Nineteenth Street, but in 1895 he shifted to Fort Hamilton, Long Island, to a house which was the property of Tom Johnson. It was a refreshing change from the gloomy squalor of the East Side. In *The Science of Political Economy* (p. 364) George described with gusto the cheerful sights he could see from his study window :

" the flowers in the garden ; the planted trees of the orchard ; the cow that is browsing beneath them ; the Shore Road under the window ; the vessels that lie at anchor near the bank, and the little pier that juts out from it ; the transatlantic liner steaming through the channel ; the crowded pleasure-steamers passing by ; the puffing tug with its line of mud-scows ; the fort and dwellings on the opposite side of the Narrows ; the

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

lighthouse that will soon begin to cast its far-gleaming eye from Sandy Hook; the big wooden elephant of Coney Island; and the graceful sweep of the Brooklyn Bridge, that may be discovered from a little higher up."

In a letter to Johnson he declared his new quarters to be the most comfortable he had ever worked in since he wrote *Progress and Poverty*.

The tonic of a change was very necessary to George at this time. He had much to discourage him. Public interest in himself and his theories had faded, and a blight seemed to have descended on the single tax movement. Distinguished personalities continued to announce their adhesion to the cause—William Lloyd Garrison, son of the Liberator; James Herne, author of the celebrated play, *Shore Acres*; and, most notable of all, Count Tolstoy.¹ But the movement had lost its power to capture popular support. The schism of 1887 had left wounds which time had not healed. The single tax forces were scattered and dispirited. In order to give George's followers something to work for, Louis Post and others had the idea of organizing a great national petition to Congress. For several years signatures were collected, and when the petition was finally presented in 1892, 115,502 names had been secured. Not all of these, however, were genuine single taxers. The petition merely asked for an inquiry into the feasibility of the single tax. Congress, needless to say, gave it short shrift. The House of Representatives referred it to its Ways and Means Committee, where it was quietly shelved. As an attempt to influence legislative opinion it was an abject failure, but it did fulfil its main purpose of bringing single taxers together. Single tax clubs were founded in numerous localities, and in 1890, after a national conference in New York, these were federated into the Single Tax League of the United States. The League gave single taxers a common organization, but it was weak numerically and poor financially. Its influence on public opinion was slight. A second national conference at Chicago in 1893 was

¹ See Tolstoy's essay on "A Great Iniquity," reprinted in the Centenary Edition of his *Works*, vol. xxi., pp. 272-306.

THE LAST BATTLE

poorly attended, despite the attractions of the great International Fair, which was held at the same time and place.¹

Various plans to infuse fresh vitality into the movement were considered about this time by single taxers. The establishment of single tax colonies was suggested, and one was actually founded at Fairhope, Alabama. George, however, did not approve of this policy. He maintained rightly that if his scheme was to get a fair chance it must be tried out on a large scale. The capture of a single State of the Union seemed a more promising idea, and it was put into execution in 1895-96. Delaware was selected as the point of attack. After Rhode Island, it was the smallest State in the Union, and its electoral population of 40,000 was concentrated mainly in the neighbourhood of the chief town, Wilmington, which was within easy reach of Philadelphia. In the summer of 1895 an army of single taxers descended on the Diamond State. On foot and on bicycles they penetrated to the remotest villages; they canvassed indefatigably; they addressed hundreds of open-air meetings; they deluged the State with single tax literature. "As goes Delaware, so goes the Union" was their slogan. After twelve months of intensive campaigning the Delaware Single Tax Party ran candidates for the governorship and other important offices. The result was a sorry anticlimax. Out of a total poll of 38,000 the single tax voters numbered 1,173. Next year the citizens of Delaware,

¹ At this conference the delegates showed their independence by carrying an important motion in opposition to George. "There was pathos in the picture," writes Louis Post, "as I saw him marching demurely up the aisle at the tail-end of the minority procession of negative voters."—*The Prophet of San Francisco*, p. 148.

According to Thomas Beer, in *The Mauve Decade*, pp. 37-38, George was much impressed by the International Fair. "He stood one night with Charles Nolan watching the crowds of the Midway, and dreamed aloud: 'The people had done all this. It was 'of the people, by the people, for the people.' The lawyer argued: 'No, most of the money was subscribed by rich men. The people had nothing to do with designing these buildings.' The economist pulled his beard and sighed. Anyhow, the people were enjoying it, and his friend Altgeld would govern Illinois. Perhaps the Kingdom of God was a little nearer. He strolled among the crowd and scandalized a waiter at the Auditorium by demanding for late supper cold, stewed tomatoes, sugared, while his host drank champagne." Altgeld was the governor who pardoned the Chicago anarchists and became in consequence the bugbear of the conservatives.

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

incensed at the attempt to make their State the scene of a Utopian experiment, inserted a clause in their constitution forbidding for ever taxes which aimed at the confiscation of land.

As a vote-catching device the single tax suffered from the disability that it promised no direct advantage to any powerful or numerous class. The strength behind political movements lies in the material or sectional interests that they represent. This is the germ of truth in the economic interpretation of history. George never allowed this idea to influence his propaganda. He was frequently accused of exciting class against class, but the charge was unjust. Hailed on one occasion as the friend of labour, he retorted, "I have never advocated nor asked for special rights or special sympathy for working men. What I stand for is the equal rights of all men." So universal an appeal produced a feeble response. It attracted individuals. It did not stir homogeneous bodies of men. George aroused a fitful enthusiasm among the workers of the towns, but on the whole they were lukewarm to his cause. Trade unionism and socialism ranked prior in their affections. In any case, the political influence of the urban proletariat was slight. The boss and the machine saw to it that the great cities were the pocket boroughs of the rich. The only really independent element in American political life was the agrarian West, which on three famous occasions, under Jefferson, Jackson, and Lincoln, had come to the rescue of republican liberty. If George could have converted the Westerners, the single tax would at once have entered the sphere of practical politics. But the wide diffusion of landownership in the West made this impossible. How can you persuade a man who owns his farm that all taxation ought to be raised from the land?

Events sometimes come to the help of ideas, and speak more eloquently to men than words. The threat of national bankruptcy precipitated the French Revolution. The World War shook down Russian Tsarism and erected Communism on its ruins. No such powerful allies came to the aid of George's propaganda. No national disaster disturbed the complacency of the American mind. No social

THE LAST BATTLE

earthquake rocked the foundations of American capitalism. The stability of later nineteenth-century life opposed insurmountable obstacles to the social innovator. Against the self-satisfied ideology of a prosperous middle class the waves of radical doctrine dashed themselves in vain.

Some glimmering of this helped to confirm George in his political opportunism. He discouraged independent political action on the part of his followers, and advocated the permeation of the older parties. He himself remained an independent supporter of the Democrats. Cleveland's record during his second presidential term had disappointed him, but his hopes revived when the Democratic Convention of 1896 nominated Bryan on a free-silver platform. With the monetary heresies of the silver-tongued demagogue George had no sympathy. Personally, he was a paper currency man. But he realized the deep significance of Bryan's challenge. It was a summons to the democratic West to rise again in defence of popular rights against the plutocratic East. To George there was not a shadow of doubt on which side a lover of liberty should cast himself. He enlisted under Bryan's standard and prophesied a resounding victory for the Democrats. But, as in most of his political forecasts, he was mistaken. M'Kinlay won by half a million votes.

• Defeat of western silver,
 Defeat of the wheat.
 Victory of letter-files
 And plutocrats in miles
 With dollar signs upon their coats,
 Diamond watch chains on their vests,
 And spats on their feet.¹

The result was an acute disappointment to George. "What did free silver matter," he cried, "the people have lost again." There was reason for his pessimism. For the first time in American history the West had gone down in a straight fight with the East. It was an ominous event for the future of the Republic.

The year 1897 opened sadly for George. He had a tem-

¹ Vachel Lindsay.

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

porary breakdown in health, and this was followed by a stunning domestic calamity. His elder daughter, Jennie, now married, died with startling suddenness while on a visit to her parents. Sickness, bereavement, and the dreariness of the political outlook gave George's thoughts a melancholy tinge. He began to be oppressed by a sense of failure. Walking one evening with Louis Post through Union Square, he exclaimed bitterly, "How hard it is to realize, now that my name seems to have been forgotten by the general public, that no longer ago than in 1886 and 1887 great crowds were surging by the park cottage over yonder, shouting 'George! George! Henry George!'" The loss of his popularity was hard to bear, but life had still a consolation prize to offer him. He was to breathe once more the congenial atmosphere of battle. He was to stand on platforms and win the applause of crowds. A dying glory was to fall like a gleam of winter sunshine over this last depressing phase of his career.

In the autumn of 1897 the citizens of New York had to choose a new mayor. It was an election of unusual importance. The city boundaries had just been extended to include Brooklyn and other communities. New York had been enlarged to twice its old size, and its new civic head would rule over 3½ million people and dispense patronage worth \$300 million. Except the Presidency, there was no richer political position in the Union.

The retiring mayor, Strong, was a reformer. Three years before, in a fit of virtue, the electorate had driven Tammany from office. Croker had retired to England, where he lived the life of a country gentleman and indulged his taste for the turf. But now he was on his way back, eager to avenge the discomfiture of 1894. He was confident of success. He told the reporters that Tammany would win by 100,000.

Croker's candidate was Judge Van Wyck, a blue-blooded descendant of the early Dutch settlers, related to all the important Knickerbocker families of New York. Personally of unblemished character, he was, as a politician, utterly insignificant. This was why Croker chose him. Such a man would be wax in the hands of the unscrupulous Tammany chief. Indeed, his candidature was taken as an

THE LAST BATTLE

intimation that Croker was fighting with the gloves off. There was not to be even the pretence of conciliating the better class citizens by running a candidate of independent character.

The Citizens Union, the reform party, put forward Seth Low, a wealthy business man, twice mayor of Brooklyn, and now President of Columbia University. Though standing on a non-party platform, Low was personally a Republican, and it was hoped that the Republican caucus would allow him a clear run. Platt, Republican boss of New York State, had other ideas. As a professional politician, he hated reformers, and Low was a "mugwump," anyway. He had bolted in 1884 and voted for Cleveland. At Platt's instigation the Republican machine put forward General Tracy, an elderly lawyer and Civil War veteran. Finally, the anti-Tammany Democrats declined to support Low because he was a Republican, and decided to run a candidate of their own. They offered the nomination to George.

There were a hundred reasons why George should refuse. His health was bad ; the contest would probably kill him ; his great book was unfinished. But the old fighter could not resist the smell of gunpowder. One by one he set aside the objections of his friends. His book was practically finished. What he had written would clearly indicate the nature of his thought. His health was his own concern. He would willingly sacrifice it in the cause of duty. When warned that the strain of the fight might prove fatal, his eyes blazed and he retorted, "Wouldn't it be glorious to die in that way?" At the nomination meeting he cried, "I would not refuse if I died for it. What counts a few years? What can man do better or nobler than something for his country, for his nation, for his age?" His instinct was right. Better to go down fighting gloriously than to rust out in obscurity as he was doing. Death, if it came, would crown him with the martyr's halo. Posterity would inscribe his name on the great roll of those who died for their beliefs.

"The Party of Thomas Jefferson" (so, at George's suggestion, the anti-Tammany Democrats called them-

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

selves) left their candidate a free hand in the drafting of his programme. George demanded tax reform and the municipalization of public services. He denounced corrupt government, the issue of court injunctions against strikes, and the use of police violence against strikers. These sentiments rallied to his side the labour forces of New York. His enemies raked up the old charges against him. He was accused of stirring up class war and of inflaming the foreign element against the respectable citizens. The local correspondent of the English *Times* informed his readers that "European anarchists, socialists, visionaries and all the refuse of European society which has drifted across the Atlantic and clings to the waterside of New York is all for Mr. George."¹

In the opposing camps the appearance of the new candidate at first spread consternation. Experienced politicians predicted for George the first or second place, and the betting on Van Wyck, which had been 3 to 1, shortened to 5 to 4. But in a few days this mood of alarm passed away. "The Party of Thomas Jefferson," it was realized, was after all a minority group. The real fight lay between Van Wyck and Low. George might help Low by detaching Democratic voters from Tammany. This was the only significance of his candidature. Tracy, on the other hand, was a secret ally of Van Wyck. He was stealing Republican votes from the reform candidate.

George cared nothing for these calculations and prognostications. The prospect of battle acted on him as a tonic, and he fought as one who meant to win. He had promised his friends to spare himself, but soon discretion was flung to the winds and he was addressing three or four meetings a day. This was in marked contrast to his opponents, who trusted to the party canvass and seldom opened their mouths in public. George declared his fervent belief in "honest democracy, the democracy that believes that all men are created equal." He asserted that it was a social not a political battle that he was fighting. If returned, he undertook to put Croker behind prison bars. Croker professed amazement at this onslaught on his

¹ *Times*, October 4, 1897.

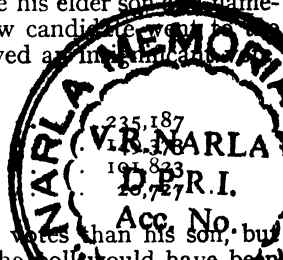
THE LAST BATTLE

character. "There is nothing they can prove against me," he said.

As the campaign progressed the strain began to tell heavily on George. He was no longer the man of 1886. The old snap and vigour were gone. The fire of his oratory blazed up only fitfully. Sometimes he almost fainted from weakness on the platform. Still, he struggled on gallantly till the last week of the election. Then, five days before polling day, the overwrought brain snapped. On Thursday evening, 28th October, George addressed five meetings, beginning at Whitestone, Long Island, and finishing at the Central Opera House, New York. It was nearly midnight when he got back to the hotel where he was staying in Union Square. His friends, already alarmed by a slight incoherency in his last speech, noted with anxiety the deathly pallor of his face which betrayed his extreme fatigue. However, after a light supper and a cigar he seemed to revive. His friends were reassured, and left him. George retired to rest. During the night Mrs. George missed him from her side. She went to look for him and found him standing in an adjoining room, his hands convulsively gripping the back of a chair, his body rigid, his head thrown back, his lips murmuring helplessly, "Yes, yes, yes." A second apoplectic stroke had fallen. This time the blow was mortal. George lost consciousness and died at five o'clock in the morning, in the presence of his wife, his elder son, and his two devoted friends, Johnson and Lewis.

His political managers had at once to take a decision with regard to the election. They resolved to fight on, and nominated in the dead man's place his elder son and namesake, Henry George, Jr. The new candidate went to the poll on 2nd November, but received an insignificant vote. The figures were :

Van Wyck	235,187
Seth Low	14,168
Tracy	107,823
Henry George, Jr.	20,727



George might have secured more votes than his son, but it is doubtful if his position on the ballot would have been

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

different. Death came just in time to save him from a bitter humiliation.

In any case, nothing could have prevented the success of Tammany. The "Wigwam" had won the most smashing victory in its history. The fickle New York populace, disgusted with a reform administration that raised the rates and strictly enforced the liquor laws, was resolved to put the connivers at vice back into power. On election night the riff-raff of the town gave itself up to a wild orgy of rejoicing over Croker's triumph. Prostitutes danced for joy in the streets. Excited men tore along with banners proclaiming "To hell with Reform." A band at the Haymarket played "There'll be a Hot Time in the Old Town To-night."

While these disreputable scenes were being enacted, George was in his grave. The tragedy of his death had silenced the voice of detraction and produced a revulsion of feeling in his favour. Appreciative obituary notices appeared in all the papers; political opponents paid tribute to the dead man's disinterestedness; even the mob, though it could not understand him, felt a sentimental interest in one who had given his life for his ideas. Vast multitudes attended the funeral. On Sunday forenoon the body lay in state in the Grand Central Palace, and thousands of New Yorkers filed past the bier. In the afternoon the building was packed for a memorial service. Leading clergymen pronounced eulogies on the deceased, and the crowd, breaking through the restraint of convention, testified its approbation by vigorous applause. Then the coffin was borne to the funeral car, and the thousands of mourners fell in behind. An eye-witness has described the memorable scene :

"As evening came on, the funeral procession moved. Down Broadway it came, on its way to Brooklyn and Greenwood, and profoundly impressive was the sight as the cortege swung around the bend of Broadway at Grace Church. Although but early evening, it was dark. Lights and shadows seemed mysteriously blended. The heaviest bell of the church was heavily tolling, and the tolling was sad and drear and of tremendous solemnity. The body of the dead man was borne

THE LAST BATTLE

high on a lofty open catafalque, which was all black, and the coffin shook and rocked as the wheels jolted over the roughness of the pavement. Alone, in front, with head and shoulders drooping, rode a man on horseback, the chief mourner and friend, Tom Johnson, himself a figure of national importance, but now likewise gone. Behind came fifers playing the saddening notes of 'Flee as a Bird to the Mountain'; and behind these, marching solemnly between the black and deserted fronts of the business houses and past this church, there followed thousands upon thousands of men on foot. It made a picture of tremendous intensity."¹

The procession wound its way across Brooklyn Bridge to Brooklyn City Hall, and there the coffin was handed over to the relatives. Next day, after a service in the home at Fort Hamilton, what was mortal of Henry George was carried to Greenwood Cemetery and buried in the grave of his beloved daughter. "All was enveloped in the soft grey light of an autumn day," his son tells us, "and beyond to the south lay the shimmering Atlantic."

On the spot a memorial stone was raised later, with these words from *Progress and Poverty* (p. 393) :

"The truth that I have tried to make clear will not find easy acceptance. If that could be, it would have been accepted long ago. If that could be, it would never have been obscured. But it will find friends—those who will toil for it ; suffer for it ; if need be, die for it. This is the power of Truth."

•

The appropriateness of the epitaph may be questioned. Truth is hard to find, and many earnest seekers after it go astray. Enough has been said in this book of the strong infusion of error which George's theory contains. It is not as a discoverer of infallible truth that the world will remember him. His title to fame lies elsewhere—in the sphere of character and motives. An unshaken belief in social justice, an unwavering fidelity to a social ideal, a dauntless courage which did not shrink from the last full measure of devotion—these are the patents of his nobility and the enduring grounds of his reputation. In his own regal prose he has described the imperious summons which

¹ Robert Shackleton, *The Book of New York*, pp. 79-80.

SINGLE-TAX GEORGE

comes to choice spirits to enlist in the eternal war against unrighteousness.

"Ormuzd still fights with Ahriman—the Prince of Light with the Powers of Darkness. He who will hear, to him the clarions of the battle call. How they call, and call, and call, till the heart swells that hears them! Strong soul and high endeavour, the world needs them now. Beauty still lies imprisoned, and iron wheels go over the good and true and beautiful that might spring from human lives. And they who fight with Ormuzd, though they may not know each other—somewhere, sometime, will the muster roll be called."¹

It is as one of this immortal company that George will be remembered. He was a brave soldier in the liberation war of humanity. By his life and death he testified his faith in the spiritual forces that govern the world.

Whoever fights, whoever falls,
Justice conquers evermore.

¹ *Progress and Poverty*, pp. 399-400.

A NOTE ON BOOKS

CHEAP editions of Henry George's works are published by the Henry George Foundation of Great Britain : *Progress and Poverty*, 1s. ; *Social Problems*, 1s. ; *Protection or Free Trade* (abridged), 1s. ; *The Condition of Labour*, 1s. ; *A Perplexed Philosopher*, 1s. ; *The Science of Political Economy*, 2s. 6d. The monthly, *Land and Liberty*, 2d., issued by the British United Committee for the Taxation of Land Values, gives current information on the Henry George movement.

Books on George's life and ideas which may be usefully consulted are :

Henry George, Jr., *Life of Henry George*, 1900.

Louis Post, *The Prophet of San Francisco*, 1930.

George Geiger, *The Philosophy of Henry George*, 1933 (with foreword by the American philosopher, Professor John Dewey, one of the most distinguished living supporters of George's ideas).

Arthur Young, *The Single Tax Movement in the United States*, 1916.

Stephen Bell, *Rebel, Priest, and Prophet*, a biography of Dr. Edward M'Glynn, 1937.

Rollin Sawyer, *Henry George and the Single Tax*, a catalogue of the collection in the New York Public Library, 1926.

Mrs. William C. de Mille, Henry George's younger daughter, presented to the New York Public Library all the books and papers in her possession relating to her father, including his letters and diaries. In addition, the Library has a very extensive collection of Henry George books, periodicals, and pamphlets. All are listed in this catalogue, which makes a most useful bibliography.

INDEX

- Anti-Poverty Society, 126, 130.
- Bright, John, 105.
- Bryan, 149.
- Cleveland, Grover, 129, 130, 149.
Condition of Labour, The, 134-7.
- Corrigan, Archbishop, 119, 123, 135, 138.
- Crocker, Boss, 116, 117, 150, 152-3.
- Davitt, Michael, 84, 90, 94-5, 104, 109.
- Ford, Patrick, 86, 96, 128.
- Garland, Hamlin, 120.
- Gibbons, Cardinal, 124-5.
- Gompers, Samuel, 118, 120.
- Grey, Sir George, 78.
- Grönlund, Laurence, 127.
- Harrison, Frederic, 105.
- Hewitt, Abram, 81, 116-17, 121.
- Huxley, 68, 135 n.
- Hyndman, 93-4, 103, 130.
- Irish Land Question, The*, 84-5, 97.
- Jackson, Andrew, 15, 148.
- Jefferson, 15, 32, 148.
- Johnson, Tom, 112, 118, 127, 145, 153, 155.
- Labouchere, Henry, 104, 131.
- Leo XIII., 134-8.
- Leslie, Cliffe, 134.
- Lewis, August, 118, 127, 145, 153.
- Lincoln, Abraham, 33, 43, 148.
- Low, Seth, 151, 152, 153.
- M'Glynn, Father, 118-19, 123-6, 127, 129, 137-8.
- Mallock, W. H., 105.
- Marshall, Alfred, 108, 142-3.
- Marx, Karl, 70, 72, 94.
- Mill, J. S., 49-50, 142, 143.
- Nulty, Bishop, 90-1.
- Our Land and Land Policy*, 56-8.
- Parnell, 84, 89, 90, 92, 94, 95, 96, 109.
- Perplexed Philosopher, A*, 134, 138-42.
- Post, Louis, 118, 128, 146, 147 n, 150.
- Progress and Poverty*, 9, 55, 63, 64, 65-76, 77, 78, 83-4, 94, 102, 103, 104, 114-15, 134, 155, 156.
- Protection or Free Trade*, 18, 101-2, 111-12.
- Ricardo, 70, 71.
- Roosevelt, Theodore, 117-18, 121, 126.
- Satolli, Archbishop, 137, 138.
- Science of Political Economy, The*, 20-1, 76, 133-4, 142-4, 145-6.
- Shaw, Bernard, 98-9, 131.
- Shaw, Francis, 86, 98, 101.
- Shearman, Thomas, 118, 127.
- Simeoni, Cardinal, 124, 125.
- Social Problems*, 83, 102-3, 106.
- Spencer, Herbert, 138-41.
- Standard, The*, 123, 129, 145.
- Tammany, 100, 115, 121, 129, 150, 154.
- Taylor, Dr. Edward, 67, 83, 142.
- Taylor, Helen, 92-3.
- Tolstoy, Count, 146.
- Toynbee, Arnold, 134.
- Van Wyck, Judge, 150, 152, 153.
- Walker, Francis, 133-4.
- Wallace, A. R., 98.

**PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN AT
THE PRESS OF THE PUBLISHERS**

